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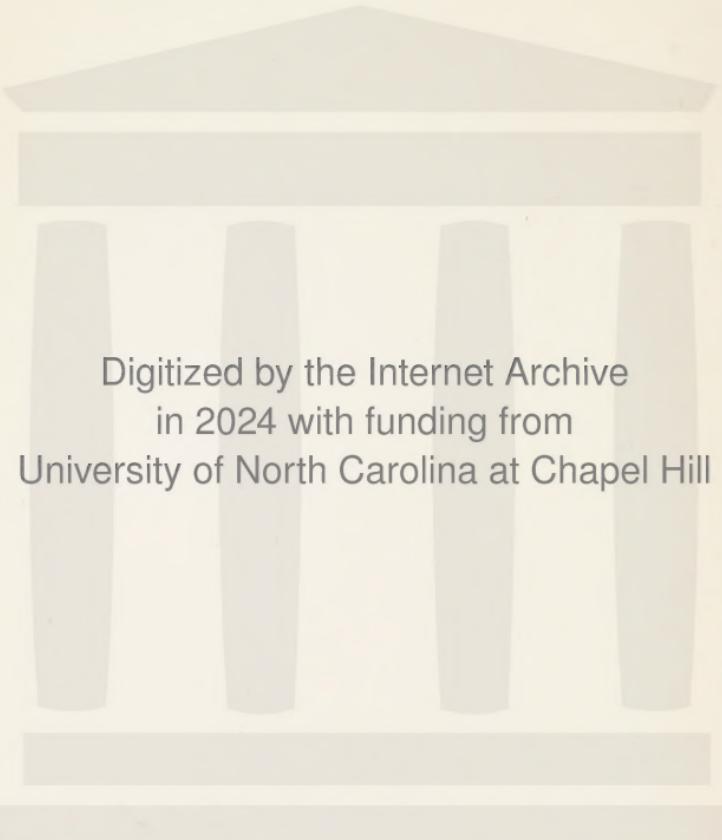
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SOME MARRIED FELLOWS.



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Some Married Fellows.

By the Author of "*The Dailys of Sodden Fen*,"
"Four Crotchetts to a Bar," etc.

"And the Souls ye left behind you
Teach us here the way to find you."

KEATS.



In Two Volumes.

Vol. II.

London:

Richard Bentley & Son,

Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen.

1893.

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SOME MARRIED FELLOWS.

CHAPTER I.

MISS SILVERHAYES received a letter from Helen Keltridge on the following day, in which she said that she had had “a very comfortable journey,” and had “safely arrived at Caernarvon;” it may be inferred, therefore, that she had already grasped the necessity of protecting her husband’s conduct from criticism. She added that some men were coming to read with Randal in about three weeks’ time; which period they expected to spend in exploring the beauties of North Wales. As a matter

of fact, she was mistaken ; for they had scarcely been a week at Caernarvon when her husband proposed that they should cut short their dual solitude, by paying a visit to an aunt of his, who lived at Llanberis. Helen was surprised.

“I thought,” she said, “that you had no relations. I never heard you speak of an aunt before. You cannot want to see her, if you have cared too little for her even to mention her name.”

“I do not want to see her the least in the world. And I don’t suppose she is the kind of person that anybody ever wants to see. She was merely the third wife of an aged uncle of mine, who has been long dead.”

“Then why go to her ?”

“Oh, I have thought it great nonsense for two people in our circumstances to shut themselves up together. We shall have all our lives to spend in each other’s com-

pany ; but, of course, if you prefer to stay here, we can do so."

The prospect, however, seemed to reduce him to such depths of gloom, that Helen determined to try the aunt as a remedy. She recognized clearly that his dislike of a situation which seemed to call for emotional display, was the genuine cause of the move ; and she was careful not to give her family the opportunity of misjudging his motives ; at the same time she was vexed and sorry, and inclined to cry inwardly, "Oh the pity of it!" Thus did pity vanquish pique.

" Do you really like paying this visit ? " she asked once more, as they drove up the approach leading to the house, where the widow lived in solitary luxury.

" Not the least in the world," he replied. " I have never liked the old woman ; but we shall be leading a more natural sort of existence, when we are stopping in some one

else's house, than when we are spending all our hours together, or alone, call it which you will."

Mrs. Crayse received them with a formal greeting, in which curiosity was more evident than satisfaction. It did not seem to strike her as at all odd or unusual that they should have been in such a hurry to accept her rather indefinite invitation. All the glamour of life, if there had ever been any left for her as the third wife of a paralytic old man, had long ago ceased to irradiate her imagination. She now felt considerable satisfaction at being left so well off. Beyond that funded source of comfort she was little accessible to sentiment of any sort. She put many questions to Helen of a teasingly trivial type. She expressed a wish to see them enjoy themselves; and to that end she provided a pony for Randal, and took Helen drives round the neighbourhood, through all the beautiful scenery; but at this period of

her existence Helen was too engrossed in the eager spelling of her own page of destiny to be free to commune with the spirits of the woods and hills ; and, as the elderly personage by her side was, she frankly confessed, "domestic rather than romantic," the long drives were dull affairs ; and Helen pondered all the time what should lift the load of depression which seemed to deepen daily upon Randal's brow.

At the end of five or six days of this perfectly monotonous round, Helen was forced to confess that if this was "the more natural life" her husband had desired, he was remarkably unfitted for it. Mrs. Crayse also was coming to her own commonplace conclusions, and one afternoon, in the middle of the daily drive, she broke silence by saying—

"Randal looks very ill and unhappy to-day. Is anything special the matter ? '

Helen coloured ; she heard her own

thoughts thus abruptly expressed, and had no immediate reply. Seeing her advantage, the older woman continued—

"I may say that I am really very disappointed at my nephew's appearance. I expected something so very different in bridegroom and bride. Something cheerful and gay. I looked to be interested, you know, and talked to, and to hear all about the ceremony and everything, and you have not even brought me a bit of bridecake. Really, do you know, I am afraid—yes, quite afraid—that you do not sufficiently exert yourself for Randal's happiness. You seem to me to leave him too much to himself. Men are nothing but children, after all. Some think them more trouble than they're worth; I don't say that, myself."

As she had been a perfectly impecunious person when she married Mr. Crayse, having, in fact, occupied the position of his house-keeper, and was now a rich widow, it was

as well, perhaps, that she did not commit herself to such an opinion.

“ But there is no doubt about it, unless you are prepared to take a lot of trouble, you had better stick to the single state. You should make more efforts to be lively and pleasing. My dear husband used to say that, though a woman couldn’t always bring a well-filled purse, she could always show a smiling face, which, I’m sure, I always did. He never saw me otherwise. I smiled as a duty. Call it a duty to be cheerful, and you can undertake it as well as any other. Who values tears? Whereas smiles are worth their weight in gold, and so I’m sure I’ve found them.”

An obvious truth not to be contradicted, this.

“ I do not think,” Helen answered, “ that it is the fact of my being quiet which makes Randal what he is; he is by nature undemonstrative.”

“Nonsense, Helen ; that is how people always excuse themselves. You don’t seem to be of a sickly constitution—that, at least, I am glad to observe ; but you should try and draw your husband out more. These clever men need to be amused. Distraction is the thing for them. Is there no game you could get up to amuse him ? My husband and I used to play *bézique* or *carté*, night after night, for love, and he never needed anything more ; but then, as he used to say to me, ‘My dear, you are one in a thousand ;’ and so I believe I was and am.”

The consideration of her own perfections kept her silent for awhile ; then Mrs. Crayse’s wandering glance fell upon the handkerchief in Helen’s lap.

“What is that I see marked upon your handkerchief ? My dear ! ‘K,’ ‘H. K.?’ Why, look here ; I have my own initials, of my maiden name, still upon my handkerchiefs !

Do you really mean to say you marked your things with your husband's initials before you were married? Such a thing was never done in my day! We should have thought it showed very unbecoming haste to take possession of a man's name. It is true I have now a dozen black-edged handkerchiefs that were sent in with my widow's mourning, which have a large black 'C' upon them; but, then, I didn't order them, and it was only a shop 'C,' such as they keep in stock. Though I was married five years to Mr. Crayse, there is not a single article in my drawers that is not marked in my maiden name. The next I get I shall use the 'C,' of course."

"I had rather not wait for my husband to die before I make use of his name," said Helen, coldly. "And as we were engaged for six months, there was no particular hurry about our marriage."

Mrs. Crayse looked offended, and said

no more during the drive ; but at luncheon-time she addressed herself to Randal.

“ Now do have a little variety this afternoon, Randal ; go down to the vicarage and ask that charming girl there if she won’t ride with you. I can’t mount your wife too, and I dare say she is not used to riding ; but the vicar’s daughter is one of the best horsewomen in the county, and such a lively and attractive girl, too. I can’t bear to see you so dull and moping, going out every afternoon alone. You’ve only to mention my name and I’m sure she’d be glad for you to ride with her ; she is not a bit stiff or shy.”

But Kelridge sourly refused, though Helen lifted her voice feebly in favour of the suggestion ; and he went off alone, as usual.

Then all the older woman’s annoyance burst forth.

“ Of course he won’t go anywhere,” she

said, "when you have clearly been using all your influence on the sly to prevent him. It's all very well to say, 'Yes, do go,' in that half-and-half sort of way, when no doubt you have been saying just the contrary upstairs. Now you've got him you seem determined not to let him stir; and he has all these young men coming too, in no time, and there will be an end of his holiday. I never heard of such a thing! Why, my dear husband wouldn't even have his second wife's sister come to see us when we were spending our honeymoon at Malvern, and she lived just over the hills. I should have thought that any right-feeling young woman would sooner have sacrificed the money, rather than have had her husband forced to work so hard at once; though, no doubt, it will come to that in the end, however well his father may have left him provided for a bachelor's life."

What more the voluble old lady might

have added, is uncertain; for, when she ceased, she found that Helen had quietly quitted the room. She escaped from the house through the garden door, and spent the rest of the afternoon in a blessed solitude, remote from Mrs. Crayse's presence, on a bank at the edge of a wooded slope.

The July sunshine flickered through the trees above her head, the air was full of the pleasant sounds of common insects, and the voices of birds and children. And the thought of Margaret, her beautiful Margaret, seemed very near to her just then. At this time, only two years before, Margaret was herself a bride, with all life apparently before her as it lay before Helen to-day. Did any shade of dread fall across Margaret's path, Helen wondered? Helen was deeply sensible that, as yet, her life with Randal had not realized any of the dreams of her girlhood. Her experiences and Margaret's had, she was sure, little in common. To

no ear would she ever confide the existence of fears, which she sought strength in secretly combating; but the words which her lips might not say, her spirit might share with that invisible friend. In this solitude she sought a refuge from the limitations of her individual lot; until her soul, having regained its serenity, grew insensible to the memory of the attacks of the weary old woman, who so evidently disliked her.

On her way back to the house, she determined to have no secrets from Randal, even in this unimportant matter; but to beg him, for her own sake, to endeavour to wear a more satisfactory countenance. She must try and get nearer to Randal if she was to be of any use to him; and it was evident that the first attack upon the barriers with which his nature surrounded itself, must come from her. She must try and make him comprehend the chilling effects of his manner.

Keltridge was handing the cob over to the groom with his usual embarrassed air, when she passed her arm through his and led him up to the little sitting-room which Mrs. Crayse had allotted them.

“Randal,” she said, “cannot you try and look a little happier? Your aunt is not satisfied with your appearance. I believe she suspects me of having captured a reluctant husband. She fears that, in deference to my feelings or failings, you are going to relinquish society, and work yourself to death to provide me with luxuries. She considers that my very pocket-handkerchiefs bear witness against me, in that they are marked with a ‘K.’ She concludes that you paid for them. You see, it rests with you to disabuse her mind.”

Randal fairly snarled with rage.

“Confound the nasty meddlesome old woman!”

“Hush, Randal! for pity’s sake. She’ll

hear you. She's in her own room, with the door open. Do be quiet ! I'd not have told you if I had had any idea you would take it like this."

"And how else did you expect me to take it, pray ? A mischief-making, vulgar old woman, just because she happens to have been taken as his third wife by my father's brother, who wished to secure a nurse before he died, to dare to speak to you as you tell me that she has done ! If you told me about it at all, what did you suppose that I should say but that we should leave her house at once ? If she dares to insinuate that I do not care for my wife, and it amounts to that, she shall learn better by the fact that we leave her house to-night. Well, to-morrow, then, if you really prefer that it should be so."

In spite of her dismay, Helen felt a thrill of pleasure in hearing him use the word "wife." It certainly was a poor little joy

enough; but it had not escaped her notice that he had never once used the term, so dear to most young husbands, before; and he always escaped the necessity of speaking of her as "Mrs. Keltridge," by addressing her directly.

"If only he would feel all these nice things about me, and yet not be so angry!" she argued illogically. So she tried another appeal.

"Randal, it really is a very great mistake to leave Mrs. Crayse's house upon an angry impulse. If any affront to me is an affront to you, surely it is best for you to forgive it, as if it were your own."

"No doubt; but I should not forgive it if it were my own, as in fact it is."

"She will only blame me for all that you do; she is of the order of women that always accuse each other, and excuse men in general and in particular. You will only render me hateful to her."

"I will take care that she shall blame me, then; there shall be no mistake about it," he replied; and he hurried downstairs as fast as his lameness would permit. Soon, from the drawing-room below, sounds of excited voices in eager dispute reached Helen's ears—Randal's voice sharp and hoarse, Mrs. Crayse's muffled and agitated.

"I have settled it," he said shortly, coming upstairs again, and sitting down wearily in a chair. "She will order the carriage for us for the first train to-morrow morning, and I wish it were to-night. I'd go off now if I were alone."

And Helen, looking silently in his face, felt herself not without a share in the weariness and disgust depicted there, the proportions of which she dared not compare even with the measure to be assigned to Mrs. Crayse.

"If only he could be a little bit more tender, as well as so very loyal!" was the thought

that sent unshed tears to burn her anxious eyes; but she made no sign, and employed herself in packing her clothes till the dinner-bell rang.

That dinner was an awful meal, with icy attempts at formal manners on the hostess's part, ill-concealed disgust with the situation on Randal's, and self-reproach on Helen's. It would have been far better, she now saw, not to have made any complaint to Randal at all; but she had not had sufficient knowledge of his character to foresee that he would resent any slight put upon her for his own sake, when he displayed so little of the personal devotion of the lover or the husband. She had not had any opportunity of estimating the depth of the shy, strong feeling of possession, which he veiled beneath a seeming indifference that daily cut her to the heart. She had, on the other side, over-estimated her power of influencing his will. In short, she had

much to learn of the nature of the man whom she had fondly fancied that she understood, when she had not so much as spelt the first letters of the alphabet of his strange disposition. Like most young wives, she had inferred his sentiments from her own, having as yet had no opportunity of learning to predict how Randal would act and feel under the altered conditions of their lives by observation pure and simple. But if Helen had no such previous experience to guide her in her relations with her husband, in her knowledge of another woman she was not likely to be deceived. As she had anticipated, Mrs. Crayse immediately assigned the whole blame of her rupture with her husband's nephew to his wife's influence, and even—so Helen observed—respected Randal all the more for having had the spirit to oppose her.

“So,” she said, when they sat together for five minutes after dinner, “you not only

resented my giving you a little friendly advice, such as older women might surely give a younger, but you made mischief between Randal and me."

She had no time to say more, for Randal hurried in from the dining-room, and, seeing Helen's heightened colour, to her surprise, thrust her arm through his own, preparatory to leading her away, observing as he did so—

"If you have anything further to say to my wife, aunt, be so good as to say it before me."

"I have nothing further to say to either of you," answered the old lady, rising and addressing them with temper; "and, as I shall not be down so early in the morning, you can wish me 'good-bye' now. Life lies before you," she added, turning and preparing to leave the room, "and I can only hope your marriage may bring you happiness. We are not likely ever to meet

again this side the tomb. For myself, I rejoice to know that the joys of heaven await me. Happiness is deceitful, and hopes are vain. Better stand as I stand, facing an eternity of bliss, than be as you are, at the mercy of an uncertain earthly future, rashly risked for the sake of a possible gain."

With this episode ended their visit to Mrs. Crayse, and the first fortnight of their honeymoon. They left Llanberis next day and returned to Caernarvon, there to await the arrival of the men who were to read with Keltridge.

The first to appear was a big, heavy fellow, with fair hair and a freckled complexion. He was a Scotchman, had been at Glasgow University, was older than most undergraduates, and made no secret of being poor. He adopted at once an easy, friendly manner, which made his introduction very agreeable. Before the first evening was over, Helen

found herself giving him a lesson in knitting his own socks, an accomplishment which he professed himself anxious to possess ; and his pity for the poor seamed hands found such genuine and yet sensitive expression, that she felt grateful to him. He told her all about his widowed mother, and his four sisters ; and in him she discovered a nature sound to the core, guileless as a child's, yet strong as that of a man who had long been the stay of the women dependent upon him, and who looked to him to supply the place of husband and son, brother and father to them.

For a few days this young Scotchman was alone with the husband and wife, Keltridge was more taciturn than ever ; but the situation was relieved from embarrassment by the simple good humour of the young fellow's disposition.

Then followed other arrivals ; first an American, dark, silent, absolutely without a smile upon his grave, absorbed countenance.

He was a year or two younger than the Scotchman, but for ten years past must have been relatively his senior in heart, mind, and experience. Small in size, no doubt, he had been as a boy; but young in heart it was impossible to imagine him at any time. He seemed disposed to treat Helen from the outset as a professional person who had married into the coaching trade, and who, as such, was but one degree removed from the landlady. If anything went wrong in his room, or in the service of the house, he took care to mention it at once; and he did it in distant and severe tones, which made her feel as if she were a person who had undertaken to keep a boarding-house for young men from the States, and had failed in the stipulated contract. Nor did he ever lay aside his separateness of manner during the whole period of his association with the party. As he came so he went; silent, reserved, absolutely individual in his habits and tastes.

By the next train arrived a lively little fellow with three boxes full of live snakes. He was small and sturdy, ruddy of countenance and of hair. He chattered incessantly about his reptiles, and kept the creatures in his bedroom. Several of them escaped one day, and got into Helen's drawing-room, where one of them crept into the Scotchman's unfinished sock. The landlady objected, the American sourly remonstrated. Keltridge recommended their owner to dissect them at once and have done with it. Whereupon the blushing lad observed that personal affection, and not any lurking desire for a knowledge of their anatomy, had led to his choice of their companionship. This personal attraction he believed to be mutual. But one of his pets being shortly discovered in bed with the landlady's baby, he was forced to take a room out with his treasures. The other two men were of the overgrown, public school-boy type, of the kind that cares for

nothing but sports. These young fellows got up sculling matches with an Oxford party located in the neighbourhood, never remembered their hours for reading with Keltridge, and got no mathematical work done at all. They were anxious, in their frank, gentlemanly way, to induce Helen to accompany them on their expeditions; they were noisy, open-hearted, mirthful beings, full of the security of youth and health; and Helen would have been cheered by their buoyant energies, but for the cold, still force of Keltridge's opposing influence. The more hilarious they grew, the freer the circulation of young life around him, the more did he sink into depths of melancholy; agitated only like the still waters of some deep, dead sea, by gusts of irritability.

Helen soon learnt that it was less anything which they did or said which exasperated Randal, than the mere contrast between his own nature and that of the eager

young men about her. It was utterly impossible for him to sympathize with them. He always suspected them of despising him for the bodily infirmity which had driven him to adopt intellectual rather than physical modes of success. Of the whole party he distinctly preferred the American, with his black, boring eyes, his taciturnity, and his secretiveness. The two sat together for hours over their books, when the rest of the party were out enjoying themselves upon the hilltops or the water. The American, at least, got the value of his money out of his tutor. The others could not be induced to study; except the Scotchman, in whose case it was clearly a matter of conscience.

The unconfessed wound which rankled in Kelridge's sore spirit was caused by the fact that he imagined Helen to prefer the light-hearted company of these young fellows to his own. He tortured himself by supposing her secret acquiescence in their

estimate of himself. He was not blind to the low figure likely to be assigned him when judged by the standard of young and athletic men; consequently his gloom deepened daily, and he grew savagely taciturn. That he did not break forth into expressions of impatience and disgust before them all, was due solely to Helen's tact. In college he had shared with indifference and scorn the contempt of thoughtless and selfish juniors for crippled and unsympathetic dongs; but now that he feared his young wife's seeing with their eyes, he could no longer remain merely callous and unfriendly.

“By Jove, what a beast of a temper he's blessed with! What's up with him? He's long odds worse than when he was in college.”

“Well, it's not her fault, anyway. She's heaps too good for him,” said the overgrown schoolboys to each other, as they sat smoking below the window of their room.

Then they went off to the shore, and forgot all about Keltridge and his afflicting disposition. But Helen, in search of the snake-lover, whose pets had been temporarily left in her care, had chanced to enter the room at the time, and their words reached her through the open windows, teaching her, for the first time, what gathered power to wound, a sorrow has, that is no longer buried in the depths of the sufferer's heart, but is openly spoken of by others. She now began to count the weeks for the departure of the stirring company, with its habits and ways so different from their own. She longed more than ever to protect this poor man, with all his limitations, from contact with these vigorous beings, whose powers emphasized his disabilities. She hoped, however, that matters would mend when the party was weighted by Mr. and Mrs. Gruter's presence, and enlivened by Ciceley's good temper.

She was receiving a lesson in whist from the Scotchman and the other two young fellows, whilst the wily Yankee engaged the lover of reptiles in a quiet game of "loo," when the expected letter arrived. She hastened upstairs to her husband's study to share it with him at once. She knocked, but received no immediate answer, having tried the door and found it locked. Then she distinctly heard him fling a heavy object back into the drawer, before he answered her summons; and she guessed what it was.

"Randal," she said, her voice full of anxiety, "I have just got a letter from Ciceley; they will be coming in two or three days. They want lodgings close by us. I am so glad they are coming, especially Ciceley. It will be so pleasant to have her about; and she will enjoy the fun, too. We shall be a big party, shan't we?"

"It only convinces me more and more," he said wearily, "what a mistake it was to take this house at all, and to live all together in this absurd fashion. We could now have joined your own party, had we been free of these noisy louts. We ought to have left them to arrange for themselves; it is perfectly ridiculous to nurse undergraduates in this innocent style. I undertook to read with them a certain number of hours a day; but there my responsibility ended."

"I thought you wished it," said Helen, in dismay. "You took the house with me."

"I wish to keep a boarding-house, and see you converted into a landlady! I did not wish to oppose your ideas, and you seemed determined on making tame pets of them."

Helen coloured. "I really did not understand, then; I thought it was the usual arrangement. It seemed only kind to take

an interest in them. It scarcely seemed right, if we had more experience, to leave them to make their own arrangements separately, and perhaps to be imposed upon."

" You have not succeeded there," he answered. " Peterskin, who is the only sensible man among them, tells me that he finds his expenses twice as heavy as they ought to be, or would have been, had they lived independently. Moreover, all the others waste double the time they would otherwise have wasted ; there is every inducement to idleness and folly, living like this ; and, when your sister comes, it will be worse."

" I thought it made their time pleasanter to them," she said sadly.

" You don't suppose, do you," he said curtly, " that they consider it ' pleasant ' to be under our supervision all day long, like a pack of schoolboys ? Peterskin, for one, has shown me plainly enough how he hates it."

Helen, surprised and hurt, began to feel warm impulses of pain and anger shaping rapidly into rash speech.

“ If he dislikes it,” she said, “ I am very sure that he is the only one of the five who would not very much prefer to be in the same house with me than not. They are all gentlemen. They are all kind and pleasant and grateful, except that man. I don’t care what his origin may be, he is not a gentleman. Even the little snake-lover is far more agreeable to me than he; I even prefer the custody of the snakes themselves to that man’s company! Yet he is the only one of the party whose society you seem to tolerate. They notice your unfriendly manner, and it hurts me every hour of the day to see it. If this is how the seniors treat the men in college, I wouldn’t give much for their influence!”

Now, first, Randal Keltridge began to realize what a force he had armed against

himself, when he gave a woman the power to tell him plain truths, with flashing eyes, from the vantage-ground of a wife's position. The shock made him gasp.

“Helen! This from you! You make me wish that I had never undertaken a reading-party at all. I only did it because I thought I might as well be doing something as not; but I had no idea of your making such a domestic business of it as this.”

“You did it,” she said, with the same incisiveness of speech—for speech once found, all the hurts silently accepted, began to demand bitter expression—“to avoid being alone with me in what you considered a sentimental seclusion; for the same reason that you made me go and stay at your old aunt's when we had only been married a week! You told Mrs. Gruter that a solitary honeymoon was a mistake; had you not done so, she would not have proposed

to come here now. It is true; at first I thought I understood your dislike of what I knew you regarded as a ridiculous situation; and I reflected that it was very foolish of people to pretend to any sort of sentiment that they did not feel; but now it does vex me to hear you declaring that it was my arrangement all along."

Without replying to these inconveniently frank words, the disturbed man shifted his ground.

"I don't at all approve of your sister's coming," he said; "there's sure to be no end of flirting. We all know what Ciceley can do in that way."

This was too much. Hitherto Helen had retained a considerable measure of self-control; but to hear Ciceley spoken of by him thus, not even to be spared the unmanly allusion to a recent past, was, she told herself, in bitter indignation, not to be allowed.

“Ciceley flirts with no one!” she replied. “To fall in love with Ciceley would be an honour for any man. If any of these young fellows fell in love with Ciceley it would be an education for him, and a great good, whether she cared for him or no. But that would not be likely.” Then, with emphasis, “I have never yet seen the man in the least degree worthy of her.”

These words were uttered with flashing eyes and a defiant manner; were, indeed, flung at the man who had himself made an offer to Ciceley, and who had, presumably, therefore, professed to be at one time in love with her. They were so unmistakably meant to bear this interpretation that Keltridge’s face grew white as he listened. He trembled from head to foot, looked more shrunken than ever, and sank into a chair. As she stood before him, and looked down upon him in her indignant youth and beauty, a great fear and pity began to knock at the

door of her angry heart; but there were cold depths in the still rage of the tone, in which he shortly replied, which froze her afresh.

“ If you separate yourself from me in this way, there is nothing left to be said. I shall never express an opinion in future as to any arrangement you may choose to make. You are free to do exactly as you please.”

There was a terribly hard force in the manner with which Kelridge flung these words, like a hail of flintstones, at the more passionate and loving being whose heart he wounded. And, having uttered them, he picked up his crutches, and retreated, limping, into his own room, and shut himself in.

“ Unmanly even in anger. Who but a woman goes away in a pet and shuts the door ?” thought Helen, with that terribly clear gift of criticism, which was henceforth to complicate her difficulties as Randal Kelridge’s wife.



CHAPTER II.

HELEN'S first impulse when she was left alone was to leave the house, and hide herself in some sequestered spot upon the shore or hillside, as she had done at Llanberis, until the storm of mental anguish should be spent, and the victory to which her unsilenced conscience even now pledged her should be won ; but she feared to leave Randal alone in his present mood. When she thought of her husband as a young wife thinks, she could not forgive him one slight after another which she had hitherto refused to acknowledge, even to herself ; and, "He does not love me—he has never loved me. It is not that he loves

elsewhere—that would be far more hopeful; it is that he is incapable of love at all," cried the spirit of the neglected bride. "Pity him. He is so much to be pitied. It is not his fault, it is his nature," pleaded the love which stirred her heart. "If you regard him with the eyes of a wife, it is hopeless; but if you convert your affection into love, such as that which a mother might have given him, you will bear, and forgive, and pity."

Then came back to her old words which she seemed to hear said afresh in her ears, "Nothing but the love of thyself doth hurt thee." Nothing but this unreasonable, unmanageable self-love, which demanded not merely scope to give, but which craved a return; which would have care, admiration, consideration, praise; which would be the cherished, honoured wife; which was hungry for the realization of girlish dreams of wedded bliss; which found it too hard to

be satisfied, as she had once imagined she might have been, with leave to devote herself to a man of true nature, and not unfaithful to her even in thought.

“And I have a right to all these things that I long for,” she added mentally. “Only then who gets his rights?” another voice seemed to reply. “Every one has a right to seek his own happiness; it would be best for all in the end that each look out for himself. The Christian ideal is a morbid apotheosis of martyrdom,” said memory, recalling for her torment shallow speeches often heard.

“Well,” she answered her imaginary interlocutor, “let it be so; the position, ‘I am sure I’d do what is best for myself if I only knew what it is,’ is not a new one. Given that I fervently determine to do it, how am I to know what it is? I might—or might not—have been happier had I not married Randal, or had I waited and married some-

body else ; but I loved him, and it is done, so that does not touch the present question. What, then, am I to leave him if I find I have taken him for the worse rather than for the better ? Is that what is best for myself ? Who can say ? I doubt even that. So it seems to me that, as a practical rule of conduct, you cannot even make a beginning with this cheap commercial axiom which modern philosophy had caught and claimed. Say, then, that not what is best for myself, but what is best for him, is to be my guide, what follows ? To that question the answer, at present, is simpler ; the day may come—Heaven help me—when to that, even, there may be no certain answer ; but, as yet, it is easy to forgive, to make allowances, to pity and to help him.”

The impulse which had driven her—as expressed by herself in the Manor-house garden—had been so strong that Helen had

expected to find it overleaping all obstacles with unconscious effort ; she was now confronted with the fact that its strength had augured not the acquiescence, but the mighty opposition of her own nature. She had read of an Eastern Buddha—his tale was related by Renan—who, in pity, offered an equal portion of his flesh for the ransom of a captured bird. So slight a thing it looked that a small fragment of flesh and blood might surely suffice to outweigh that tiny lump of feathers ; yet bit by bit the whole of the devoted man's body passed into the scales before the bird was delivered, and the soul of the saint released. This story returned to her memory now.

“Why, here I am,” she mentally exclaimed, “quailing before the first demand in this renunciation of which I was certainly incapable of estimating the cost beforehand.”

All self-pity must, she saw, be avoided if she was to succeed in the task which she had

undertaken of helping to release this isolated soul. There was such weakness in self-pity. It was the most enfeebling thing on earth, second only to that disposition which lays itself out for the pity of others, and leading directly to it. The woman who begins by pitying herself will never end there ; she saw that plainly now. Still, she could not yield at once. Back and back came the memory of her wrongs. "What right had this man to take a girl, young, admired, beloved as she had been, and subject her to the cold, indifferent neglect which had been her portion with him ?"

"Give in ! give in !" cried the other voice. "What does your self-love matter ? He is so sad a man ; his very bitterness arises from the fact that he knows himself to be different to other men. It is pain that makes him cruel. Many and many a man who would have made a woman's life happier, in a paradise of selfish enjoyment, will ruin her

peace in later years from motives equally selfish. This man will never do that."

These and a host of other thoughts strove in her mind as she stood weeping, and looking at the lovely prospect of sea and land from her window. She would have gone out, trusting to register the result of the conflict in a victory somewhat deferred, but for the knowledge that Randal, being of so bitter and unrelenting a nature, might destroy himself, but would never make the first advances towards a reconciliation ; would never confess himself to have been in the wrong.

She was perhaps hardly wise in the unconditional surrender by which she ultimately sealed their reconciliation ; but it was a necessity of her just and loving nature to be in harmony with those whose lives made the environment of her own. In entreating for the restoration of mutual confidence, she was careful to leave out of the question all

assignment of blame. She insisted only upon their undoubted mutual desire for each other's good and happiness.

Randal let her plead in silence. His aspect softened; but of words he seemed to find none.

The silence threw her back upon discouragement; she must turn to something definite, must speak to him of facts, not feelings, then he would understand. So she told him of the thing that she had seen him handling, and asked him when he got it.

“It makes me nervous,” she said. “No doubt you think me foolish; but I wish you had not brought it with you. It is such strange luggage for a wedding-tour, and I do not like to see you dealing with it as you were doing when I came up just now.”

“I shall find a use for it if you ever leave me,” was the abrupt reply, that left no doubt as to the use intended.

“Randal! I entreat you, do not talk so.

It is dreadful ! Why should you say such things ? ”

“ Because,” he exclaimed, with vehement emphasis, the words wrung from him by hidden agony—“ because I am a miserable, wretched being, crippled in body, soured by solitude, maddened by the failure of my last attempt to escape from my prison-house ! I had thought that I could join my life with yours ; that I could heal mine at the expense of yours, if you choose to put it so ; but you have found me out. You have seen what I am ! I read it in your eyes just now. Soon you will hate and fear me ! No, deny nothing. I know you are sorry for me now ; you showed me your true feeling. You have a tender heart and a sensitive conscience. At present you deplore the pain you cause ; but the same thing will constantly recur, again and again, till we are both worn out. I cannot unite my life with yours. You cannot force the walls of my prison-house.

Years ago, when I was younger, it might have been different. It was my last hope, this marriage, and it has failed ! ”

“ Randal, do not say that ! You are cruel ! ” she cried. “ Give me time ; give us time. We cannot make one whole of our two lives in such a little while, such a very little while ! You do not know the force of a love like mine—like ours, shall I say ? It is just because it is different to what it might have been, and perhaps usually is, that it is certain to contain forces that we have not yet proved. Don’t you see what I mean ? Supposing my feeling for you were a mere girlish attraction ; you could not now rely on its permanence, neither could I. But my feeling for you has in it the elements of a love such as your mother might have felt for you ; and that, you know, is a very patient, undemanding sort of affection. It is a love that gives and gives, and never claims. Something like that I think I could prove

myself capable of in time, if you would only be patient with me and with yourself. I thought of myself just now when I was angry and spoke unkindly; another time I will try and remember."

So she pleaded earnestly, her face lighted up with hope; but he answered wearily—

"It would be better for me to go away and leave you free at once. I know it, but I have not the resolution. I am a selfish coward; I cannot give you up just yet, though I foresee the inevitable end which you cannot accept just yet, being younger and more hopeful. I am a poor pitiful wretch; since I have seen you with these happy young fellows, I have known the kind of life that you were made for. Any one of them would have made you a better husband than I shall do. Now you know what I was thinking of when I was examining that thing to-day. I was praying, yes, praying for resolution—not to take my own miserable

life, I can summon up courage enough for that at any time—but for strength to perform the only unselfish action left me, on my part, to give you up, to set you free by the only means by which you can be freed from the burden of sharing my lot with you. But I am so contemptible that I have not even the moral force for that, though, I assert it, the physical courage I possess. Now you know what you have married, and what is likely to be your fate."

It was then that Helen gathered up her faculties for renewed promises and entreaties.

"I will never rest until you value yourself because I value you so greatly," she said, hanging affectionately upon him.

But, in spite of the good which this explanation did, there remained a deep thread of determination in his mind which she continued sensible of. His resolution was, she felt, unaltered by anything which

she had power to urge. The threat of self-destruction remained, leaving her with an uneasy sense that it was to be the inevitable penalty for the divergence or withdrawal of any part of her own life from the control of his, from the dominance of his inflexible will. The same clear-eyed judgment which rendered her severe to hardness upon the weakness of her own self-love, forced her to see that the moral cowardice of which he accused himself had been displayed less in his failure to relinquish her at once, than in the disposition which permitted him to leave her under the mastery of such an idea, to be an ever-haunting dread. To remove himself from her path by suicide might, no doubt, have been a mistaken act; but it would have been the act of a man, and of an unselfish one. To threaten her that he would destroy himself if ever she liberated her life from the control of his, was to make her a murdereress

if she ever thought of herself, or of any other human being, save of him, Randal Keltridge.

Professor and Mrs. Gruter and Ciceley arrived. Ciceley full of eagerness to see her sister, now that she had been married two months. She wondered where the change would be. She found it where she had least looked for it, in the silence which fell like a curtain between them. Ciceley, having given the clearest proof which a woman can be supposed to give, that she did not regard Keltridge in a favourable light, was one with whom Helen felt it desirable to be doubly on her guard in mentioning his name; but it was Mrs. Gruter's and not Ciceley's penetration that she dreaded. Mrs. Gruter was the more dangerous of the two, since she had known the realities, whilst Ciceley had only spelt the idealities, of life.

To the undergraduates Ciceley's presence

was like rain upon a thirsty soil ; they lifted up their heads and grew visibly livelier—excepting always the American, who seemed strongly disposed to resent this fresh interruption to his studies.

It was well for Helen that this diversion of attention from herself occurred when it did, for Randal's painful remarks had embarrassed her in her happy relations with the young men. She felt, or imagined, his restless eyes always upon her with disapproval, and she grew silent and uneasy where she had previously been spontaneous and cheerful. The change did not escape Mrs. Gruter's observation, nor did the scared look which she often surprised upon the young wife's face ; and one day, when all the rest of the party had gone off upon an expedition, she set about the delicate task of trying to see if there was any work for her judgment or affection to do in the matter. With the thought of Margaret

ever present with her, and the memory of Margaret's brief wedded bliss still shining in golden letters before her eyes, Margaret's bereaved mother's heart yearned towards this other girl, whose lot she divined to be so different. Without putting any definite question, she sought to elicit some indication of the direction in which possible difficulties might be.

To all her affectionately put questions Helen returned brief and evasive replies. She responded warmly to demonstrations of interest, but she maintained her reserve.

Then suddenly, when they least expected him, the door opened, and Randal entered. He had started with the rest of the party, and his return was absolutely unlooked for.

Both the older woman and the younger one had a sense of guilty conspiracy. They hastily drew their chairs back from each other's; Helen picked up a book, Mrs. Gruter her needlework.

Randal regarded them both in suspicious silence, took up a paper, looked at it without sitting down, then quitted the room. Helen rose and followed him. How assure him that his unuttered suspicions were false, and that she had not mentioned his name to her friend, excepting in conventional terms? She feared Mrs. Gruter's sympathetic advances; they rendered it more difficult for her to maintain the position she had deliberately adopted. She had discovered the force which lay in absolute silence, and she had determined never to be betrayed, by any weak desire for sympathy, into sharing sorrows which were hers and Randal's alone. All the strength which solitary endurance gave would be immediately sacrificed even by the legitimate satisfaction of the natural craving for sympathy. So, when she followed Randal out of the room, her course was taken. She fled less from Mrs. Gruter's

well-intentioned words, than from her own sense of weakness. Soon she was even to learn the necessity of keeping the secret of her misery even from herself, lest kindly anxious eyes should rob her uncovered consciousness.

“If ever I am beaten, and deliberately determine to give in, then I will speak ; but never before,” was the thought in her mind as she hurried after Randal.

“Helen,” he said, fidgeting nervously with the books on the table, “it is absolutely out of the question that I should undertake this sort of thing for a month longer. In fact, regarded as an arrangement for study, the whole affair has become a farce. Peterskin has been speaking to me about it this afternoon ; he feels that, with all these distractions, and so-called amusements, and with this large party coming down, it is perfectly impossible to do anything whatever in the way of work ; and he has made up

his mind to leave at once and return to Cambridge."

"And I am thankful for it," Helen might have said; but she felt that this was only the preliminary to what was coming.

"Neither, in fact, am I prepared to stop here any longer; the thing doesn't suit me; the details are none of my arranging. Will you be so good as to give the landlady a week's notice?"

"But, Randal, do consider; Mr. and Mrs. Gruter have only been here a week, and my brother and Dr. Silverhayes are coming on Wednesday."

"I can't help it; I've work that I must get back to. They are waiting for proofs of my book at the press. I have undertaken to read with Peterskin for the rest of the Long, in Cambridge. It is a complete sacrifice of my time to remain here any longer; we must leave by the early train on Wednesday. As far as these young Goths

are concerned, it is not of the slightest consequence whether I am here or there. I don't wish to deprive you, however, of the society of your relations. If you choose to remain, you can, of course, do so, and follow me later."

"But where am I to go to when I do return to Cambridge?"

"We had better take your brother's house, as he wishes to part with it; it seems the best arrangement."

A spasm of pain crossed Helen's face. "Go back there!" she said, "where I saw Margaret burnt to death! Randal, it is cruel! I cannot do it! Why are you so hard?"

But Randal rushed away as though suffering unbearable annoyance, and an hour later Helen had represented to Mrs. Gruter and to Ciceley that her husband had urgent business in Cambridge, which compelled their return thither. Her little tale

did not in the least deceive Mrs. Gruter, but she respected its motive. Ciceley, on the contrary, was indignant.

“She ought not to give in to him ! She is beginning the wrong way ! He will become an unendurable tyrant at the end of a year, if this is the way he is to be humoured,” she said to Mrs. Gruter ; but that lady shook her head.

“So it appears to you now, my dear ; but I am not so sure. The longer one lives the less certain one can dare to feel about the relations of husbands and wives ; and ‘a young marriage,’ as a wise washerwoman once said to me, ‘is like a tub before the hoops are set—it won’t bear any strain.’ By-and-by, when it has been seasoned by wind and weather, it will stand the stress of opposing circumstances ; but not yet.”

Then Ciceley inwardly resolved to cherish her own freedom, and to be especially on her guard since Unwin Silverhayes was

coming down ; and she guessed what had determined his choice of the locality.

On Tuesday evening the young Scotchman, MacBee, came up to Helen shyly on the stairs. “ You probably have not time to superintend the knitting of the magic socks to-night, Mrs. Kelridge ; but that matters less, as I return with you to-morrow. I propose to read with your husband for the rest of the Long.”

So it came about that Randal and she were accompanied both by Peterskin and MacBee on their return to Chevington’s deserted house at Newnham. During the journey MacBee showed her all the attentions which might naturally have fallen to Kelridge’s lot, whilst the latter sat at the other end of the compartment apparently absorbed in a book ; but when, at a station, MacBee got out to fetch her an ice, and a lady in the carriage made a mistaken observation showing that she took him

for the husband and Kelridge for a stranger to her travelling companion, the latter scraped his lame foot upon the floor with suppressed annoyance. When he returned to the carriage MacBee saw that something had vexed Mrs. Kelridge, and that she was not disposed to talk any more, and he showed her no further marks of civility; but Peterskin did not fail to repeat the incident to him with gusto when they afterwards met in hall, and the story got about amongst all the men up, to the Scotchman's intense disgust. He refrained from paying his promised call, and the half-knitted socks remained unfinished at the back of his drawer, where, however, he was careful to preserve them from contamination by his tobacco-pouch, since Mrs. Kelridge's gentle hands had touched them. Soon she found that her husband's mere presence seemed to weave an influence around her, which rendered all her relations

with her fellow-creatures less simple and easy than before.

In his old college rooms, just as they were on the night when he first heard of Olive Fayle's death, Randal Keltridge sat alone. The heat of the late August day had been intense; the courts were all deserted; the trees drooping and covered with dust. The few men up were all lying on their backs inside their window-ledges, with their feet protruding, their various flannel uniforms supplying bright patches of colour to the dingy walls; or were lazily rocking in their boats where the river skirted the college lawns—save one who, having found the chapel door unlocked, was languidly trying the effect of a comic song to an accompaniment picked out upon the organ. Keltridge was thankful that all his collegiate goods remained in their former positions; his special chair in its accustomed place, his books and papers scattered about in their

old confusion. Some men, when they married, removed all these things to the new house where they established their wives ; he had been too wise for that ; moreover, they were as yet only lodged in Applewood's house, and had none of their own. A sense of escape came over the dejected man. He was not reading, he was not exactly thinking ; he was merely enjoying the freedom of his bachelor's retreat, and possibly regretting vaguely that to which he did not give a name. Presently his thoughts crystallized themselves, taking on more definite and sharper outlines. He gave himself up to the unfortunate suggestions which beset him. He would think the matter through ; it might be as well that he should.

Why had he sacrificed the comparative liberty of life lived within college walls, for one of wider promise possibly, but for which, he now told himself, he was utterly

unfitted? There were so many other things that he might have done, if he wished to vary the monotony of existence. He might have travelled more; he might have extended his experience of men and of women, especially of the latter, before taking so irretrievable a step. But it was too late; the thing was done, and it was "a hideous mistake!" He knew it already, and admitted bitterly that it was his fault. She refused to recognize it as yet; but the time must come for her too, he knew.

"I will give her a year, poor thing; I will give her a year," he said, "and then I will put it clearly before her, that she will certainly be happier away from me than with me; that for her own sake she had better leave me, that we had better agree to part. I will do all I can for her. I will halve my income with her. There are women all over the world, so I have read, who are as happy as possible in their freedom. I can't say I

ever met them ; but, then, I have met so few women, more's the pity, and know so little about them. There are wives home from India ; but they mostly have their children. There are women ordered to winter abroad whose husbands are in London offices ; but they are invalids. Then there are the detached dames, and the merry matrons, who dislike domesticity ;" but a vision of Helen, serious, sensitive, refined, crossed his imagination, and he flung away a book he held open before him, and groaned in despair. " But she would loathe them, and shrink from them with every fibre of her being."

After a pause he continued his silent colloquy.

" We are both so terribly serious. What a pity we cannot live and laugh ! I could find it in my heart to wish, for her sake, that she could laugh and leave me. But why shouldn't she try a career, since she must take life so seriously ? Why not espouse

a cause? She might work for a degree, and distinguish herself; she is clever enough. Or she might try hospital nursing, and satisfy her philanthropic instincts. I wish Mrs. Gruter, or some one, would advise her to do one or the other. It is maddening to have her sitting opposite to me, waiting for our domestic bliss to begin! Good God! I am the most wretched man alive; and I shall be driven to abolish myself, if I am not to make her the most miserable woman!"

Then the anger of despair seized upon him, and in his heart he cursed his fate. Yet he had told Helen but so short a time ago that he would not survive her departure; and he honestly meant it. And, as he grew calmer, he recognized that it remained unalterably true that, even for his own sake, what he desired was that she should stand by him in his narrow lot; that she should play out with him their united parts, defying criticism, and silencing comment. If the

task were too difficult for her, then she should go, with his free will, and he would grudge her nothing that lay in his power to make her life as desirable to herself as might be.

A sort of rest came over his tortured spirit, when he had so far vanquished his own misery as to consider this aspect of her lot; and the next day he laid the idea of some definite occupation before her. "Had she not better read?" And he suggested Peterskin as a guide through the avenues of intellectual thought.

Helen was surprised, yet gratified at this evidence of his having thought independently of her. She accepted the suggestion of intellectual work, but decidedly rejected the proposed teacher. Keltridge took the refusal in bad part, irritably insinuating her fancied preference for the Scotchman over the American.

"It is true," she said calmly, "that Mr.

MacBee would suit me far better to read with; and, as he is poor, it would give me pleasure to think he might benefit by being employed as my teacher. Pray let it be so. You can, if you please, arrange it yourself, as he never comes here."

And, at her request, the jealous man did make the suggestion to MacBee, but in so strangely rude a manner, that the young fellow sent in a brief note at once declining the proposed favour. Helen easily understood that the note might well be accounted for; yet she persisted in her unqualified rejection of the American as a teacher.

In the sad house at Newnham she had for ever before her eyes the last tragic scene in Margaret's brief wedded life. She sat in the same rooms; Margaret's wedding gifts, not her own, filled the shelves, and covered the tables. In those early days she seemed to have but a secondary existence; to be surrounded by tokens of Margaret's happiness,

yet to have no share in one symbol of that vanished bliss ; nevertheless, the influence of that sweet memory was not without its power upon her heart. Randal spent more and more of his time in college ; and Helen worked early and late in her silent room, at the subjects assigned her.

But the October term came at last. Freshmen filled the streets. Fathers interviewed the busy tutors. Mothers smiled and chattered in china shops ; and amongst the earliest returning residents came Professor and Mrs. Gruter, and Ciceley Applewood.

Ciceley came back smiling, bringing sunshine and laughter into Helen's dull life ; pleased with herself and with every one else except Randal Kelridge. Helen soon learnt that Dr. Silverhayes had been of the party in Wales ; but that her brother's non-appearance was accounted for by his recently announced determination to return to a life at sea.

Then Helen learnt, further, that Unwin Silverhayes was even now at the Manor-house, and that, sanctioned by his presence, his aunt proposed to give a party, "at which you really must appear in the white satin dress which you refused to wear at your wedding, Helen, since it is the first party you have been to as a bride; and you must make Randal go with you too, whether he hates it or not. The Professor will stay at home and sing to the canaries; but Mrs. Gruter will go. Happily for her, she is always so much herself that she has not to dress up her mind and manners for the occasion when she goes into society. She is so good, she tries so hard to fill the void with me, but I am such a miserable make-shift for Margaret. Now you, at any rate, have the satisfaction of being first to somebody, Helen."

But whilst she spoke Ciceley looked curiously at her sister.

“There are people who would gladly have you first to them, Ciceley.”

“I dare say,” said the girl, recovering her sprightliness; “but, unfortunately, it isn’t mutual. I prefer to be first to myself, more than ever. In arranging my life I mean to consider and consult myself first; and what I propose to do I am not ashamed to own. I have observed that most men have far better times than women, and I attribute the fact to their being, as a rule, undoubtedly more selfish; so I intend to profit by the observation.”

“I should call that a narrow deduction,” said Helen, “the result of a still narrower observation; you don’t know a sufficient variety of women to judge by.”

“Possibly not; would you have me wait to decide till I do? I have already expressed my willingness to remain as I am; if so, we agree,” said Ciceley, laughing.



CHAPTER III.

GHEVINGTON Applewood's presence in his house gave Dr. Silverhayes an early opportunity of learning the date of Ciceley's return to Cambridge, and he lost no time in presenting himself at the Manor house, and in persuading his aunt to issue invitations, which might provide him with a pleasant opportunity of meeting the young lady in question. During his stay at Caernarvon, he was not aware of having progressed much in her favour; Ciceley had been most provokingly agreeable in his society, whilst yet invariably keeping well within the bounds she appeared to assign to their friendship. This was exciting and

amusing. It was, in fact, a happy play, in which both enjoyed their parts; and Silverhayes was anxious for the call-boy's repeated summons, for the music of the overture, and the sound of the manager's bell. He wanted to find himself again performing his part to his own secret satisfaction; his eyes longed again to behold her as she tripped across the boards to the same lively encounter. This desire was stimulated, moreover, by some rising irritation at the steady persistence of the opposition with which Ciceley met every attempt of his to play the lover's part in earnest. There was no doubt that the keenest zest of life that Silverhayes had tasted lay in his half-real, half-dramatic courtship of this beautiful and lively girl. A little more reality, and the tragic would creep in; a little less, and the play would have lost its attraction: as it was, this living, palpitating drama, was simply the most exquisite and inspiriting pastime; refining

alike to the man's manners, wits, and senses. If it led to no other end, it would at length surely leave him a wiser and a better man for having lived and laughed with Ciceley Applewood; for, as her sister truly said of her, it was an education to any man to have paid his addresses to this fair creature.

"It will be a very dull affair, Unwin," his aunt had modestly said beforehand. "You know that, although we are so close to this centre of light and learning, we are very tame people out here. The cleverness and the views and the ideas don't extend so far as to our village. Three miles out makes a wonderful difference. Most people don't care to come so far, and I don't suppose my neighbours will interest you at all; they are just kindly people who like the cakes I give them for their tea, don't despise even home-made music, and are not in the least critical or cynical, as you all aspire to be."

"You malign us, aunt. I assure you I

look forward to your party as I counted on a pantomime when I was a boy."

By the time that Mrs. Gruter and Ciceley, with Helen and Randal Keltridge, arrived, Miss Silverhayes's long low room was full of sober guests. There was the village vicar, who took his stand mainly on common sense and plain speaking; the late curate, who had married the said vicar's daughter and now presided over a neighbouring hamlet; the present curate, who got into disgrace the first Sunday, by defending philosophic doubt before the school-children at the afternoon service. The vicar showed him up the next Sunday, and he now hid himself behind the door from the sight of his spiritual master; whilst the vicar himself, nothing doubting, occupied a prominent position before the printing-press, where he handled some of old Laban Silverhayes's choicest bindings, as though he had a right of proprietorship in them; and his wife, in the biggest arm-

chair in the room, drank her tea out of one of the rare old china cups, doubting still less of anything, and of herself least of all. Then there were a couple of family solicitors from Cambridge, a brace of doctors, a small selection of resident M.A.'s, and a fair sprinkling of undergraduates; also a row of old ladies in black gowns, and a bevy of young ones in white frocks.

Into this assembly were duly ushered by Silverhayes, the bride and bridegroom. She, very pale, with a world of subdued trouble in her soft dark eyes; he, limping painfully after her, through the long, dimly lighted passage which led from the vestibule to the drawing-room, evidently finding it difficult to maintain his place amidst the sweeping draperies of white satin, which she strove to keep out of his path. Ciceley followed, radiant and lovely, in a pale pink dress, to which Mrs. Gruter's black robes supplied a background. Miss Silverhayes

thought it a pity that her nephew, in his eagerness to receive them upon the threshold, lost the striking effect which their entry produced.

The contrast between the sisters was now more marked than ever; all the life which shone so brilliantly in the one face, seemed to have been withdrawn from the other, and a stream as still and deep as death to have taken its place in her veins. The bridegroom lost no time in secluding himself in the recesses of the bay window; indeed, the reception of Dr. Silverhayes seemed so particularly abhorrent to him, that Helen fell to wondering whether the desire to avoid this very man might not have been an important factor in her husband's extreme reluctance to accept Miss Silverhayes's invitation. She remembered now how he had fled from Caernarvon at the first hint of the arrival of this very man. "What hold had Unwin Silverhayes over Randal's mind?"

Tea despatched, and the precious old china reverently touched and returned, the home-made music began. A widow of sixty, who lived in a cottage hard by, informed the company assembled that "some day" she should "meet him!" not, as might reasonably be inferred, "the late lamented," but some future gay Lothario; another, of the same respectable standing, entreated her mother to "rock her to sleep." As a set-off to this extreme hopefulness, the late curate and his young wife struck up a morbid duet, in which they confided to sympathetic ears the fact that they had lost "hope, joy, peace, and love," and had "only memory left." Then the present doubtful curate was fetched from behind the door, and, after casting a furtive glance at his vicar, who stared through double eye-glasses in an opposite direction, he began an edifying penny-reading ditty, of which the moral taught that, if bereft of

all your senses you need not despair, so long as you were blessed with reason only.

After this the spirits of the company fell to zero; and Miss Silverhayes passed from one to another nervously, asking if they "felt a draught." They all felt it directly; and Unwin Silverhayes decided that it was time to interfere; so he started the popular subject of ghosts. The Manor-house was haunted, or he vowed that it was; he declared that he had actually seen, with unbiassed professional eyes, the shades of his ancestors wandering round those ancient rooms; he asserted that, just before that very company arrived that evening, he had seen their silent forms glide through the passages and mount the narrow stairs. This drew the vicar, who held it incumbent on himself to rebuke the spread of superstition in his own village; and to denounce all who stood up for any release of spiritual beings from the pages of the Testaments.

Old and New, the panels of carved pulpits, and the lights of stained-glass windows. Then broke in the doctors, with their modern materialism, their allusions to livers and overworked brains; and the solicitors followed with their myths of family fortunes diverted or restored by ghostly agencies. One very stout lady declared that she trusted "nothing disembodied" would ever come near her, or she should die on the spot. All the various professions offered their services; jokes were made, arguments started, stories told, flirtations inaugurated, and, the conversation having become general, Unwin Silverhayes found time to approach the magnet that was happily attracting his admiring eyes.

"May I take a chair beside you, Miss Applewood?"

"You may take two if you choose."

"But I am serious. I want to say something very real to you that has for some

time been much in my mind. Let me say it now, whilst they are all talking at once."

Ciceley was surprised. She had not expected him to commit himself. She thought she had kept their intercourse so well within bounds. She rose quickly and would have moved away; but he saw what he had done, and hastened to reassure her.

"You might trust me more than you do, Miss Applewood; remain where you are, I entreat you. What I wished to say to you had, I assure you, no reference to my warm admiration for yourself. I am well aware that you deny me liberty to touch upon that theme. I wished to say a word to you about quite another matter."

Ciceley was too mortified at having allowed him to divine her immediate conclusion to reply to his enigmatical words, and he continued lightly—

"Certainly this party of my good aunt's would have died of dulness, had not the

ghosts dispelled the gloom. It's a good subject for a tea-party ; it unites all parties by dividing their opinions ; it stirs up opposition, imagination, argument, emotion. It is associated with all science and all religion. It points to the past, embraces the present, and prophesies of the future ! I had to tell a lot of lies to arouse the present company. I reserve the truth for your ears alone, Miss Applewood. It remains true that I have seen two ghosts to-night ; one of a bride with a white face, and eyes that were full of fear and trouble ; the other of a bride-groom—are you listening now ? I want you to attend to this, it may be as well that you should know of it—who has, I know, at least once contemplated self-destruction, and who looks as if he might any day attempt it afresh."

Ciceley's immediate concentration of quiet attention proved that Unwin Silverhayes had not been mistaken in his high estimate of

her self-control; but, unfortunately, at that moment, young MacBee, who had been standing with his back to them, turned, and interrupted their social solitude.

“Well, and how goes on the knitting, Mr. MacBee?” she asked. “Not finished yet! Has my sister become such a blue-stocking that she has no time for grey-worsted socks? Come to me, and I’ll set you up a pair of silk ones, in the college colours, nice neat stripes all round, and lovely sky-blue heels and toes.”

“Mrs. Keltridge has not begun to talk about her ‘mind’ yet, that’s one comfort,” said Silverhayes.

“*We* don’t talk about our minds,” said MacBee; “we leave that to dons and ladies. There’s an old don on my staircase who is always engaged in mastering the multiplication table; he is ambitious to be dodged in his ninety-nines. You may hear him muttering ninety-seven times ninety-nine,

and so on, when you pass him on the stairs."

"The women are the worst," said Ciceley. "A girl came to luncheon at Mrs. Gruter's yesterday, and, after talking about her education and her examinations for an hour and a half, she apologized thus, 'I really hope, Mrs. Gruter, that you do not object to my talking upon the subject which is, naturally, most interesting to me; as Professor Gruter is upon several boards of studies, I hope I need no further excuse.' 'Well, my dear,' Mrs. Gruter replied, 'if I were the dentist's wife, I should not expect you to discourse to me about your teeth; so, perhaps, we may as well change the subject now.'"

Every one laughed; and MacBee observed, "University society strikes me as peculiar, judging from my observation at such dinner-parties as I have had the honour of being invited to. It seems to

be the thing to pose as pure Intellect. You must not weakly imagine yourself to be possessed of a soul; you should, at any rate, hold your judgment strictly in solution on that point; or if, by chance, you like to entertain the hypothesis quite privately for your own satisfaction, you must never let the fact escape you. Neither is it, I believe, good form to be supposed to possess a body—although, by the circumstance of a dinner being placed before you, the fact must be taken to be conceded; yet it is certainly not the thing to allude to it in any way."

"That is in silent protest against the boating and sporting slang of a certain class of undergraduate," said the doctor.

"Very likely," said Ciceley; "yet, I protest, I am unable to see why such very clever people, who would smile scornfully at the allusion of any poor, simple-minded person to the making of his own soul,

should be permitted to talk by the hour about the development of their own intellects. Both subjects are equally personal."

"In fact, you never get out of your own mind. It's a vicious circle!" said the doctor, laughing.

"Now, Dr. Silverhayes, that is unworthy of you; go away, pray, and assist that departing dame to find her wraps."

As she spoke, Ciceley slipped into his hand a scrap of folded paper. The action did not escape the notice of the little hostess, who was flitting about in a soft satin, the colour of a dove's wing, with filmy white trimmings of India muslin. It was a persistent regret of this dear old lady's, that she felt she could not wear the beautiful antique lace which her grandmothers had worn before her, because it really was so very yellow that it went ill with her silvery hair. She was fond of telling her nephew that he must choose a wife to match the

family lace; and he had long promised to select "a woman with coal-black hair, well frizzled in front, a bilious complexion, and a temper to match." She thought of the rash promise now, when she saw him with this lovely girl, whose fair hair shone like sunbeams upon her smooth forehead.

On the scrap of paper which Ciceley put into his hand, Silverhayes found she had written, "Where can I speak with you? I must hear what you have to say."

She was determined to atone for the misconception, which she dared not yet think of; it would, she knew, make her cheeks burn hotly when she faced the remembrance, even though she would be alone in her own room in the darkness of night.

"Follow those people into the dining-room; I will join you as soon as I've seen them off," was his answer.

"Dr. Silverhayes," she said, when he stood facing her, "you were speaking to

me about my sister. It is quite true. I am very unhappy about her. She looks like the ghost of her former self; and it is no wonder, living so much alone in that wretched house, where she saw Margaret burnt to death. What is Chevington doing? How is he occupied? We do not know, and we never see him now. You must give him a message from me; it is, that he is to send Randal notice to quit that house; that he must turn him out of it upon some pretence or other."

"It would be best that Mrs. Kelridge should come up to town herself, and see her brother. I think I can undertake to make him send her a pressing invitation."

"That might do good," answered Ciceley; "then they could arrange it together. But, tell me; what more were you going to say about Randal Kelridge? Make haste, for I must be gone. You shocked me, you know, but I didn't show it."

“No, I knew that you were to be depended upon, Miss Applewood.”

“And how did you know it, pray? I was really not aware of it myself.”

“From observations, personal and professional. By the judgment of my heart and my head. If we two take this thing in hand together, it will be odd if we do not find in ourselves and in each other the capacities of the modern guardian angel.”

Ciceley was determined not to be too sensitive again, so she took no exception to the words; her wish to obliterate her previous misconception had in reality advanced his interests more than all his previous attempts had done.

“You don’t think, from what you have seen of Randal, that he is out of his mind, do you?” she asked.

“Certainly not, Miss Applewood; but then, he is equally, certainly, not in a right

and proper frame of mind for a bridegroom to be in."

"I can't pretend to understand what that frame of mind may be," said Ciceley, dryly.

And the man, happy in this compact, which gave him every hope of further intercourse with the girl who charmed him so, forbore to make any reply; but allowed his eyes to speak the words which his lips withheld.

"I have observed your brother-in-law closely," he said, "and I hold it not without the bounds of possibility that the suicidal impulse may some day be suddenly developed in him."

But Ciceley, to his surprise, cut him short impulsively.

"And I too have observed Randal Keltridge closely, with better opportunities than yours, Dr. Silverhayes, and I tell you, that he may threaten anything to keep his wife's will well in subservience to his own; that he

may very likely keep the dread, as a penalty, hanging over her, for years to come, if she does not conform her life to his will in all things, but that he will never do it. He has too much self-love. But Helen you do not know," she said, speaking with the vibrations of strongly repressed emotion in the tones of her voice—"if ever she became convinced that she was really adding to, rather than alleviating, the miseries of his lot. If he ever taught her to feel that her love was useless to him, and herself a burden—all which he is as likely as not to do—then I believe that she would be quite capable of taking such a step."

"Well, we must watch over her," said the doctor, briskly. "Shall it be our task, yours and mine together?"

"I don't know why I tell you this," said Ciceley, without exactly replying. "I dare say it's very queer of me, but I don't care to talk to any one else about it—not even

to your aunt or to Mrs. Gruter ; they have none of them sufficient experience. They would all do harm somehow."

In the midst of his preoccupation with the fair speaker, the youthful confidence of this judgment struck Dr. Silverhayes as funny ; but he recognized that the natural predilection of youth for dealing with its own affairs, involves the rejection of all interference that might curtail its liberty of action. Each generation having to play its part in turn, it is a necessary instinct which prompts it to resent the suggestions of the one that preceded it : its own methods will be in their turn superseded by the one that follows. But Unwin Silverhayes, having lived long enough to have passed the stage of self-assertion, was amused at the exhibition of the spirit in this pretty girl.

" You may absolutely confide in me," he said gravely, " and command me at any time."

“I know that,” she said warmly. “If I did not know that you were true and loyal, I should not have spoken; but a doctor, if he is a good man, is always the wisest man out, I imagine.”

“Some young ladies would say the clergyman,” he said, smiling.

“No, no!” answered Ciceley, vehemently. “Not so cool, not so fair; too apt to be tied by a prejudice to what he regards as a principle; the clergy are too ready to consider the person approaching them last, and their own position first.”

“Where did you learn these things, Miss Applewood?”

Ciceley was certainly revealing herself to him under a new aspect, and he was intensely gratified.

“Oh, I have been observing and observing always, without seeming to see. I believe I am far more what might be called ‘worldly wise’ than Helen, and in reality far less

impulsive. She has a much nobler nature than mine. She is worth me over and over again ; but I have my uses too, and I believe now that I possess a less exalted ideal than hers, although I used not to think so."

"It is precisely the opposition of a disconcerting reality which develops all that is highest in any one's ideal," he said seriously. "Out of the shock of the collision with the actual, the saint, the hero, and the martyr are born. Undoubtedly, without the rankling of some sword in the heart, very little of the best work of the world would ever have been accomplished. As an incentive to exertion the stimulating power of pain has, over and over again, proved itself superior to the attractive force of pleasure."

"That is hard," she said, "and desperately grave for an evening party."

"I speak as a man who sees pain and misery very nearly day by day, to whom

every form of bodily suffering and of mental anguish is of necessity familiar ; and I give you honestly what seems to me the best advice under the circumstances when I say, 'Wait ; give your sister and brother-in-law time. Do not attempt to interfere.'"

Ciceley, standing with one foot on the fender, extended her hands to the fire, which the early autumn days and the nature of the old house rendered pleasant. The room was full of shadows, being dimly lighted with wax candles. Miss Silverhayes did not tolerate mineral oils, and there was no gas in the village. On the other side of the fireplace Silverhayes leant upon the chimney-piece. Ciceley thought she had never seen him look so handsome before ; his mantle of superficial cynicism had fallen from him, and she saw for the first time the real man at his best. Ciceley felt that she had never comprehended him fully before ; but many a dying man and woman had seen

him thus, many a bereaved mother, and many a patient in the London hospital, where he was more truly known than in college precincts. To each it was a revelation of the other's truest self, not lightly to be forgotten by either. They took a step onward that night towards a fuller appreciation of each other than they had ever reached before. But footsteps were heard approaching. They grasped each other's hands and parted. Mrs. Gruter and Helen entered; but, before they did so, Dr. Silverhayes had gained the gravel walk in front of the house, where he was standing by their carriage, when they took their leave, as though he had been for the last half-hour solely engaged in speeding the departure of his aunt's guests.

The pressing invitation, which Dr. Silverhayes had undertaken to make Chevington Applewood send, duly arrived for Helen, and she went up to town to see her brother,

about the house at Newnham, before he set sail upon his intended voyage. When she reached the doctor's house, she was told that Chevington was out, and she passed into his private sitting-room to wait for him. And before long she heard his quick footsteps on the stairs, and rose to welcome him. Then she saw at once, with joy, that the perfect nervous balance which had previously distinguished her brother's bearing was in great measure again visible ; that the confident poise of the fine head was again marked, as, drawing himself up to his full height, Chevington fronted her cheerfully.

“ Well, Helen,” he said, “ so you have come to say good-bye to me. It is true I sail on Friday morning. I shall take my departure from Fenchurch-street Station for Tilbury. I am going by the *Karitoba*, and in due course of time you may expect to have tidings of me from Australia, New Zealand, and the Islands of the Pacific,

China, and Japan. I verily believe a life spent mainly at sea to be the one life possible to me now, as a deliverance from myself and my own sorrow. There is no escape in intellectual work."

Helen thought of all the books upon her own table in Cambridge and of her futile efforts to silence her affections by stimulating her intellectual curiosities.

"I must find work somewhere," her brother continued, "which will use up all my physical energies, and, whatever the work is to be, it must contain an element of excitement, even of risk, in it, if it is to be sufficiently attractive to me. There's a camp of American Spiritualists in the Brazils who have substituted fire vision for the ordinary crystal vision of the seer, and I've a notion of looking them up ultimately, and of seeing what they have to show me; for, after all, Helen," he added, lowering his voice, and speaking with deep seriousness,

"wherever I go, I go to meet my wife; you know that is so; but with no haste, without any hurry. I shall be content with my work, when I have found it, till the moment comes—which she has already shown me—wherein, having finished it, I shall again find her. In the fire she left me, and there she will, at last, I know, receive me in the eternal marriage of our souls."

Helen began to feel some uneasiness about this exaltation; was it altogether wholesome? She determined to consult Dr. Silverhayes upon the point before she returned to Cambridge. Then her thoughts reverted to her own troubles. "A sorrow which has a grave to weep its first anguish away at, and a resurrection such as this to console it, is a holy and wonderful thing," she reflected. "Who would not choose it rather than the nameless griefs whose graves exist only in the hearts of the mourners; griefs

which in place of tears demand of the victims that they wear the mask of joy? He possessed his love, and it can never die for him; mine is dead before it ever lived. It is I who have learnt the deepest lessons of sorrow, whilst he thinks I am but spelling the alphabet of joy."

But, as though to give expression to her thought, her brother changed his topic.

"But you have told me nothing about yourselves. Randal couldn't come up with you, I suppose? It is all the kinder of you to have actually torn yourself away from him for a whole day. What does he say to this first parting with you? And have you been very happy, dear?" he asked, flinging himself into another easy-chair by her side.

Helen had no answer ready.

"Well, I know you cannot tell me that; but make the most of it, Helen. If I had not made shipwreck among the grim realities so soon after I set out upon my

own fair voyage, I should not dare to be so unconventional; but life has grown so desperately real to me, that I grow impatient of the trivialities of humdrum conversation, and I am prompted to appeal at once from my own deeper feelings to those of others. It's a bad trick; but, with you, I may indulge in it. We were so happy there, you know, my darling and I. I can say that to you now, because you can understand me better, can you not?"

Helen's clear eyes were fixed upon his face. She had, for the time being, passed beyond the limitations of her personal experience, and she was striving to interpret the indications which she read in the radiant power of his wonderful countenance. There was a sort of lofty gladness in its expression, as of one who carries some great store of hidden joy about with him. She made no answer, therefore, to the personal appeal, and Chevington continued.

“Silverhayes tells me, Helen, that it is not good for your health to be in that poor house of ours at Newnham. Ah, how happy we were there, and how short the time! But I can well understand that both you and Randal also, since his spirits are not robust, may be better out of a place that has such sad associations for you. So I will write to him that I propose to sell the house and will give him formal notice; you understand. You had better, at once, find another for yourselves. But I do hope you will have no unpleasant associations with the furniture, for I should like to give it all to you as a wedding-gift. I shall never have a house of my own again. Some men marry again, and they are quite right to do so, if they feel themselves unmated: but that is not my case. I do hope you will accept it all, just as it stands.”

Helen thanked him warmly, declaring

she should value the things all the more for their previous usage by himself and Margaret. Then, as she was silent, Chevington continued, in the same tone of lofty emotion.

“As for me, I found my bride, and I shall never lose her; death cannot quench our love. For a while after the tragedy, the shock of the catastrophe blinded my eyes and deafened my ears, I could not see her face, nor hear her voice; but now I am beyond all that. We have reached each other across the gulf which seemed to separate us. Now I possess her again, imperfectly, indeed, so long as I myself am imprisoned in my body; but quite consciously even to my outer senses at times. Think, Helen; this is a very wonderful thing. You have your present realizations, and, no doubt, to yourselves they seem the best and highest form of attainment that there can be. Very possibly

you even cherish the hope that your love may continue to exist when your lives are ended; but I—from my further outlook—tell you, that I do not hope, I *know* that love is immortal, and that death need not dissolve even the outer consciousness of its bonds; but I trust that your education, Helen, yours and Randal's, may be more normal than was ours."

"I would rather hear you talk of something else, Chevington," she said. "It must be painful to you to endeavour to throw yourself into what you suppose to be our present lot."

"I can quite understand that you do not care to talk much about yourselves," he answered. "All that is too near; tell me of Ciceley. Has she broken many hearts of late?"

Then Helen found it easy to divert his attention—optimist as he was, in spite of all—from her own affairs to the family

history. But, over and above a certain natural anxiety in parting with her only brother, she was aware of an element of doubt as to the marked degree of mental exaltation which he displayed.

She made an opportunity of speaking of it to Dr. Silverhayes before she returned to Cambridge; but he did his best to reassure her, bidding her remember that he was himself at hand to cure any mischief which might befall his body; and that, as a man who had never seen a vision, nor conceived a rhapsody in his life, he was quite prepared to control any cerebral excitement, which might affect Chevington's judgment. The doctor assured her that he regarded her brother's present exaltation as the natural reaction of a vigorous and sanguine constitution against despair; and he confessed that, in his judgment, Chevington's chosen mode of life was a perfectly wise and healthy one for him to revert to, perhaps the only

one which could be found to offer similar chances of happiness and well-being for mind and body.

"In fact," he said, "if he likes to believe that his guardian angel, in the shape of his deceased wife, dictated the arrangement to him, I can only say that I wish all our celestial protectors would do as well and wisely for us. I am afraid, when guardian angels were served out, they didn't go round, and so we doctors have to play the part ourselves."

"But Chevington has become so visionary," objected Helen, who disliked Silverhayes's tone, "since he has given up all his intellectual work. Is there no risk in the exclusive development of this peculiarity?"

"Ah, I can see you have been studying philosophy, Mrs. Keltridge," said the doctor, throwing himself back in his professional chair, for it was in his own sanctum that this conversation took place;

and, like other men of his calling, Silverhayes was one man when professionally consulted, and quite another man at other times, as Ciceley Applewood had lately found. "And you are already beginning to believe in the entire desirability of sitting down safely on the ground, where you can fall no further. It is undoubtedly my own position; and therefore there is some absurdity in my advocacy of another course; yet allow me to remind you that there is no guarantee against despair even in the materialist's safe seat upon his mother's lap, since the very earth may open at any moment and swallow him up, and he may descend alive into the pit of destruction. Your brother has escaped that fate, by virtue of his idealistic temperament. Let us be thankful that such a door of escape—I might perhaps more aptly say, that such a safe balloon—has been provided for him, by his imaginative and emotional tempera-

ment. I say this although I am myself a man to whom the testimony of a post-mark would be of more value, as evidence, than the best accredited angelic apparition out, and who would any day welcome a solicitor's clerk with a well-attested copy of a gratifying testament, descending from a penny 'bus, rather than a messenger alighting from a chariot of fire! That is my precise position, Mrs. Keltridge, and remember that I am here to pull him back, if your brother appears to be in any danger of immediate levitation; so make your mind easy until he sails, I entreat you."





CHAPTER IV.

HELEN was met at the station by Ciceley, looking more radiant than ever.

“Come back and have luncheon,” the girl said, “and tell Mrs. Gruter and me all about everything. Randal won’t be back till night; you know that perfectly well. You told me yourself there were college meetings all day.”

“They are over,” said Helen.

“Well, then, there are ‘audits,’ I’m sure. There always are ‘audits’ of some kind or other before Christmas—bursar’s audits, or butler’s audits, or plate audits. The

master's footman is sure to have borrowed a spoon of the college butler and to have forgotten to return it, and they will have to summon everybody before them as a preliminary to the reappearance of the spoon ; after which the steward will reduce the governing body to tears, by telling them that the washing of the college table-cloths has cost fourteen pounds, five and ninepence three farthings, this term, and that the fraction will have to be deducted from their dividends. They will not get over that before hall ; so you may as well come with me and discourse to us about Chevington. And then, in the afternoon, I'll walk out with you to the Manor-house, and you can relate to Miss Silverhayes every detail about her nephew, including the precise colour of the border of his pocket-handkerchief."

Did she want to hear about Unwin Silverhayes herself ? Helen wondered.

"I must go home first," Helen objected.

“Chevington wishes to part with his house. He is going to write to Randal about it, and I am anxious to prepare his mind for the letter; but he wishes us to take the furniture, and everything else.”

“What, all Margaret’s things?”

“Yes; when I asked him if he wouldn’t come down and see them again, he said ‘No,’ they all belonged to the past, and for him Margaret existed now, in the present and the future. He said he shouldn’t sit and nurse her morning-gown, if she had gone out for a walk in the afternoon; that it had cost him agony to lose the sweet garment of her soul, that it had made his reason reel, and his heart almost cease to beat; but that, now he had made this supreme sacrifice, he had received her highest self back again, and that the mere belongings of the body, which he had given up, could not possess much value, if any, for him.”

“Do you understand it? I don’t think I do,” said Ciceley.

“I see that it is a true feeling in him, and I sympathize with it in him; that is all I can dare to say,” answered Helen.

“Well, I am not really quite so sure whether it is a wholesome feeling to be so ready to escape from the body to the soul,” objected Ciceley.

“Certainly it would not be so for *you*, my pretty sister; but Chevington is different.”

“Well, I certainly haven’t got any miseries of my own, that is one comfort,” said Ciceley, decidedly; “and you ought not to have any, Helen. Some people talk of miseries as if they were inevitable, like measles; it’s morbid. Now, here I must turn off. Mind you come in presently.”

When she did go in, later on, Helen found Professor Gruter nursing a sick rabbit in a basket by the fire, Ciceley reading, and Mrs. Gruter writing letters.

“So Randal has not come home?” said Ciceley, sharply. “Would I marry a resident Fellow!”

“You might do worse,” observed Mrs Gruter.

“Yes; what a comfort it is, too, that, whatever you do, you might do worse,” answered Ciceley.

“No doubt there is a college business meeting, and they are building a pig-sty on one of their farms,” suggested Mrs. Gruter; “they built so many pig-sties when Professor Gruter used to attend meetings for the transaction of college business, that I’m sure they must all want re-roofing by now.”

“That sort of thing takes them all day, and requires oysters for luncheon! Oh, I know all about it,” said Ciceley.

“If you two are going out to see Miss Silverhayes, you had better go, and come in and see us again afterwards, or you’ll have

to walk home in the dark," said Mrs. Gruter.

"What a comfort," said Ciceley, "to hear Mrs. Gruter speak again, with a flash of her old brightness. What have you to tell her about Chevington, Helen?"

"Just that I found him strong in the sense of a union with Margaret, independent of time and place; believing that she still exercises a powerful influence over his life, and that her presence shines through the veil between the visible and invisible worlds, which veil he feels to be a very thin one; but that all this is, he realizes, too solemn and mysterious to explain to us in words. He feels it, but cannot talk about it; it is a consciousness of individual communion, which deepens as time goes on."

"Well, Margaret is just quite dead to me," said Ciceley. "Dear, sweet thing! I go and put flowers on her grave every Sunday, and that is when I seem nearest

to her ; and I think it quite unmitigatedly sad that she should have had to lose her beautiful, lovely life, and go away from such a devoted husband, when she had only had him such a little while, and never see her dear little baby alive either ; and every time I am particularly glad and happy about things, and whenever any one comes near me that is nice and good to have for a friend—like Mr. MacBee, or any other, you know, Helen—I think to myself, ‘Oh, poor Margaret, not to be alive, in her warm nest of love and joy ; but out there, all alone, under those miserable dead flowers, in that sodden ground.’ That is how I feel about it, I confess to you, in that heathenish, childish way. Whatever her present happiness may be, you see, I cannot understand it, the idea of it does not appeal to me ; but I can appreciate the good, and beauty, and promise of such a life on earth as hers was. All my days, Helen, to the very end, I shall cry, ‘Oh

the pity of it !' when I remember Margaret, as she stood with us that day in the Manor-house garden. Think, Helen," added the girl — snatching at the crimsoned leaves left upon the brambles, as they passed — " think of all the joys she might have had, the dear, common joys of husband, and children, and home; disembodied bliss is quite another thing, whatever it may be. 'Spirit loves in spirit bodies.' Oh, it sounds so cold and thin ! No, it is loss, pure loss, which can never be made up, never overtaken ! If she had been old or ill, like her father; if she had had her life, and had drunk the full cup when it was put to her lips, like her mother; if she had had time to grow contented, and placid, and resigned, like Miss Silverhayes, it would have been different. But it is for the joys she never had that I pity her so; rare, beautiful Margaret ! "

And Helen's heart made answer, not at

that moment only, but for many years to come. "Even for the very sorrows that she never had, I could find in my heart to envy her. Happy Margaret, who lived so little and was loved so much."

They found MacBee sitting with Miss Silverhayes; but, in spite of Ciceley's provocative reminder of the blue-and-white silk sock, he declined to stay and walk home with them.

"Poor, brave fellow," said Miss Silverhayes; "he is out of spirits. His mother and sisters are very ill off. He'll have to step into his father's place directly, now that he has taken his degree, with no hope of a life of his own."

Ciceley looked grave.

"You find your knitting a great comfort, when you are worried, don't you, dear Miss Silverhayes?"

"Undoubtedly, my love, the monotony of the employment is soothing."

“Then, why on earth, when I mentioned that sock to Mr. MacBee, didn’t you make him wait to walk back with us? I am thinking of setting up a class for teaching knitting and needlework to undergraduates, fees to be paid in flowers. I am sure it will be very popular, and he might be my first pupil. ‘Domestic Economy’ is the only thing left that there isn’t a tripos in; and, as all the women are taking up mathematics, it’s time the men went in for stitching.”

In due time Helen passed her first examination with credit, but determined to proceed no further with the prescribed course of University studies.

“I cannot do it, Randal,” she said; “it is all very well for those young women who have hearts and minds at liberty to devote themselves to their work. But that is not my case, and I do not find that many of the subjects interest me sufficiently to occupy my attention.”

"I had thought you might distinguish yourself. Have you no ambition?" he answered.

"None," she said. "Ambition and curiosity were both left out in my composition: but I mean to try reading philosophy. I am still sanguine enough to engage in the search, however vain, for a system of ethics which may supply the place of the religious dogmas which I find myself forced to relinquish my hold on. The religious thought I was trained in does not adapt itself to the growing needs of my experience, and I am anxious to pursue the philosophical ideas which must surely supplement it."

"You will merely exchange practical for scientific doubt," he answered wearily. "Philosophy is commonly merely an excuse for vague thinking. If you expect to find it coming in where religion falls short, I take it you'll be mightily deceived, Helen; that is all. The philosophy is far more likely to cut the religion still shorter!"

"Is that what it has done in your case?" she asked, with a wife's bad habit of direct retort.

"Never mind me. I am not in the habit of speaking of myself in relation to these matters," he said irritably.

Indeed, he would have made his escape, according to his usual custom, but that Helen, finding it so difficult to get speech with him, had seized the opportunity when they were going out to dinner, and he was by her side in a cab.

"Please yourself, take your own way," he went on; "but, if you regard my advice, you would follow some line of precise study, mathematics, astronomy, or logic."

"Would it please you, Randal? I would do it gladly if it would give you pleasure. I think I could succeed, if I felt you would be just a little bit proud of me if I did."

"If you ask me for my real feeling in the

matter, I should prefer that, as my wife, you ran no risk of being plucked," he said discouragingly; "it is one thing to go in for a study, another to run the gauntlet of the examiners."

By this time they had reached the house to which they were going, and, chilled and disappointed, Helen entered the drawing-room. In those days, had she spoken truly, Helen must have given it as her opinion that marriage doubled the sorrows and halved the joys of life. In the solitary existence which she and Randal were leading, she was always seeking ideas which might gather together and bind into one their separate experiences. Their very enjoyments remained apart, and were not completed by the mutual consciousness of happy association; whilst the stroke of fear struck double, like a pendulum vibrating from his heart to hers.

When Chevington's letter came, suggest-

ing that they should vacate his house at their earliest opportunity, Randal paid but little attention to it. He would neither allow Helen to take a house without his seeing it, nor would he go and look at any which she and Ciceley selected. When Lady Day came round they were still where they were ; then he declared that they should continue their present mode of life until midsummer.

“After that,” he said, “if we decide to remain in Cambridge, we will take another house for the October term.”

“If we decide ! What do you mean, Randal ?” Helen asked in dismay. “How strangely you speak. You have no idea of leaving Cambridge, have you ?”

“For my own part, none whatever. I have spent my life in college, and I should choose to die there. My only regret would be that I couldn’t be buried, with my crutches, under the chapel floor, like my

predecessors ; or, better still, bricked up in the wall over the men's heads."

" But why leave me out of the question ? " Helen asked ; at which remark he looked the very picture of despair, as though, amidst all the miserable thoughts that crowded his mind, he were seeking for some one that permitted utterance, and, finding none, he hurried out of the room, and returned to college.

Helen was still standing by the window where Randal had left her, looking out upon the trees in the college gardens, now dressed in all the beauty of their spring green, when the door opened, and Miss Silverhayes was ushered in. Helen found it almost impossible to collect her attention for the simple talk by which the good old lady tried to hide her observation of something strangely forlorn in the young wife's attitude.

" We are going to stay here till mid-

summer, Miss Silverhayes," Helen told her. "Randal and I had just been discussing the matter when you arrived."

"And is that really the reason why you were looking so dreadfully distressed when I came in?" Miss Silverhayes asked, her sympathy getting the better of her discretion at length. "Can you really not recover the associations of this house?"

"Oh no, no," exclaimed Helen, eagerly. "I could be content to stay on in this house for the rest of my life, if that were all. It is we, the living, who are to be pitied, not those who are dead."

Then, after a few minutes' conversation upon indifferent matters, Miss Silverhayes thought it better to go. She dared not trust herself to speak; but, as she embraced Helen, she whispered, with strong emotion--

"Oh, my dear, my dear! I know it! I have seen it all along! I feared it would be so from the very first; but take comfort.

You may die, or he may die, and then you will be at rest ! What more can I say ? ”

Then she picked up her little silk bag, wound her soft grey shawl round her, and hurried down the stairs and out of the house, before any one could open the door, leaving Helen speechless and shocked.

Even the best comforters—and some women are almost comforters by profession—are apt to go wrong. Perhaps no one is really wise enough, or sensitive enough, to be trusted to take their walks abroad among the sorrows of husbands and wives ; and this little lady had had no experience of her own to direct her steps aright. Certain it is that her well-meant words were a great shock to Helen ; but, as such, they were of more service to her than the most happily worded expressions of sympathy could have been. In excuse for the dear old lady it must further be added that death seemed so near to her at all times, that for

her it bore the aspect of a kindly, friendly helper to turn to, whenever she felt sick or tired. She would, at such times, arrange her dainty dress, fold her patient hands as she sat in her chair by the Manor-house fire, and dream for hours about this messenger that was to take her to the paradise she sung about in church. To her it was a thought as of her mother holding out loving arms to enfold her, as when she was a tired child. The imagination of death was to her a real comfort and consolation, and she offered to the young wife, hungering and thirsting for a fuller draught of life, the thought which was the consolation of her withered age.

Upon Helen's ardent nature the effect of her words was such, as even in her youth, when the curate had pained her gentle heart, Miss Silverhayes could not have guessed.

“Has it come to this, then, that my best friend can offer me no consolation but the

ghastly hope of death? Is this all that lies before me, this horrible thought of annihilation, this final tragedy of the tomb? When I have not lived my life, when I have been cheated of all its realizations, when love has been whispered in my ear, but has never nestled in my heart, when every promise of my youth has been turned into the mockery of my maturer days. Death, and nothing but death for me, in the midst of life, and health and strength. And why? Because I am so miserable that, like some wounded animal, the sight of me annoys my friends, and they selfishly doubt if it would not be more merciful in the God they worship to kill me rather than to let me live! Or to kill him! She said, 'You may die, or he may die.' And why should he die, poor soul? Just because nobody values him, nobody understands him, because he contributes to nobody's happiness. Just because he does not matter

in any one's life but mine; and mine he renders wretched because it is linked to his own!"

Then all the repressed passion of the girl's strong nature asserted itself.

"Have I indeed gone about with my secret written on my face in such plain lines that even this simple soul could read them? Is it even possible that others, less kind and less charitable, really think that I should be relieved if he were dead? The doubt is a horror! But if she—so good and gentle—can dare to say such a thing, others may have entertained the thought in their imaginations. I cannot go and tell her of it. And I cannot rest as I am!"

And rest indeed she could not. In her impatient misery and indignation, she put on her hat, went out and walked for two or three miles at as quick a pace as she could command, out into the country, and back again, choosing the direction of the Manor-

house, in case she felt that she could go in and confront Miss Silverhayes. But, when she reached the house, it did not seem possible ; there was nothing she could imagine herself saying which would not make the matter worse.

Miss Silverhayes was so good and gentle, she had meant no harm. She would not willingly say an unkind thing. She had meant to offer her the best consolation, only she did not know that the consolations of the end of life are the aggravations of the beginning ; only hers was a solitary, single soul, and she could not guess what it cost Helen's passionate loving nature to feel that any one had it in their power to speak thus about the man to whom she had dedicated her life. But, in her ignorance, Miss Silverhayes had taught her friend a lesson which she never forgot.

“ I have, indeed, played my part ill, if she, good as she is, can dare to speak to

me so," was Helen's reasoning, as she grew calmer.

And that day she took her first step onwards out of anger and dismay. She deliberately resolved no longer to waste her energies in trying to make her life with Randal such as she had dreamt that it would be; but, in childish phrase, henceforth "to make believe very much," that that which she desired it to be, it was. Not to deceive herself, that would be out of the question; but, whilst facing the truth herself, to act a part before everybody, before her world. To accept her lot was a step that she felt she had not yet come to. She was not even sure that it was right for herself, or for her husband, that she should strive to content herself with it, empty and unsatisfactory as it was; but, so long as their present relations existed, she then and there resolved that she would play the part of a happy and contented

wife, as she would never have played it had it been a real representation. If it could not be her lot in reality, at least she would act it perfectly. She would, moreover, throw herself into the society about her. There was plenty to interest her in the ideas and conversation of the men amongst whom she lived. When she dined out with Randal, she would no longer be contented to allow herself to be entertained. She had already discovered the exhilarating effects of the play of men and women's minds upon each other. She would give the rein to her social instincts. She would learn to lead, not merely to follow the drift of other's conversation. She would have another life besides that of personal experience; and in that other life she would taste the delight of mental association with cultivated spirits in a wider range of theme than any suggested by individual experience. Something also there was in all this of the

natural reaction of youth and vitality, against the depressing influences of the last months. In any case she returned from that walk elated and buoyed up by these considerations, determined to make a stepping-stone of her private sorrows upon which to reach to a heightened enjoyment of social intercourse; and to gain force from the very excitement of the drama in which her actual experience was to be the hidden thing, and her attainment was to be measured by the success with which she concealed her real part.

“Never again,” she said, “will I sit silent and depressed as I did at Miss Silverhayes’s party last autumn; no wonder she noticed it. I almost deserved what she said. No, I will be a social success, for Randal’s sake as well as my own. Perhaps he will begin to be almost proud of me then. He may like better to go out with me if he sees me cheerful and gay. I will make friends

with men as well as with women, and so escape from the narrowing influences of my own particular lot. I will have a social character as well as a private one. With my private one no one shall have any concern. If I am to make anything of my life with Randal, it must be secured from observation. He is not able to endure criticism; if it were directed upon him, through me, I had better leave him at once, it would be more merciful."

So she resolved to divert observation, to repel questions, to reject sympathy even, if necessary; but never in future to run the risk of comment, or consolation, such as Miss Silverhayes had brought her that day.

As she passed King's College Chapel on her way back, it struck her that she was just in time for the five o'clock service, and that to listen to the music would be a rest. She sank back in a stall, and remained without definite concentration of attention

till aroused by the words of the anthem.
"Commit thy way unto Him, and He
shall give thee the desires of thy heart."

"The desires ! what desires ?" she
wondered, as the lovely voices of the boy-
choristers rose and fell; some vague, far-
off spiritual aspirations, some longings that
it would be praiseworthy and scriptural to
cultivate, or those dear, warm, familiar
yearnings that dwelt with her day and
night, and lured her on by the lovely
promise of their tempting, tantalizing faces?

In the seats below her sat a row of
B.A.'s, with their white rabbit-furred hoods ;
surely that rough head of yellow hair which
leaned against the wooden pilasters at her
feet was familiar to her ! She looked again,
and identified MacBee. She would take
the opportunity of speaking to him after
the service; it was so seldom that they
met now. He had to go into one of the
side-chapels to divest himself of his surplice.

so that she had no difficulty in overtaking him at the entrance; and, in obedience to her invitation, he walked by her side round the grass and over the bridge towards her destination. They discussed trivialities till they were upon the point of separating, when the young Scotchman suddenly exclaimed—

“What a solemn mockery all that exquisite music is! People go just to be soothed by the mere sound!”

“Not all,” said Helen, hastily.

“Not those,” he added bitterly, “who have got all that they want, all their ‘desires.’ You know what my position is, Mrs. Keltridge; I am a very poor man. My father left us all in poverty and debt. He ran through a fortune, and then died. I am his only son, and my mother and sisters look to me for everything; and, until last summer, strange as it seems to me now, I was not merely reconciled to, but was

actually proud of the responsibility. Very boyish, wasn't it? But, since then, all that is changed; and you must know the reason. It was only one week I was with your sister in Wales, then I fled, and returned here with you and Mr. Keltridge; and I have honestly avoided every opportunity of meeting her since, even when she has herself invited me, in her kindness. Well, now you know, if you did not know before, what the 'desires of my heart' are. Mrs. Keltridge; and you also know how absolutely impossible it is that they should ever be realized. I have not the remotest chance of being in a position in which I could attempt to introduce myself to her notice. I have no prospects here, and I shall be returning to Glasgow immediately."

In truth Helen could not say that she took a much more hopeful view of his position with regard to Ciceley than he did himself. She believed her sister to be

drawing nearer to Dr. Silverhayes than she had done before, and the young man did not misinterpret her silence.

“This must be my adieu,” he said. “I am going off on Thursday. I shall not see her again; but if ever I could serve you in any way, Mrs. Keltridge, will you be sure to let me know? I will send you my home address, if you will allow me.”

“And you would like me to send you a line about things in general once in a way?” said Helen, kindly.

His sad eyes brightened, and he expressed genuine gratitude for this small favour.

“And about the ‘desires,’ ” she added, with some hesitation, as he waited to take his leave, “I can only give you the answer that I made just now to similar questionings of my own. Surely it is the speech of the old to the young. We don’t know anything about it yet; we don’t and can’t understand it; we must wait, for long years perhaps,

until we are further on, and then we shall be better able to judge of its meaning. But friendship counts for a great deal, and if you and I make that highest compact together, and agree to strengthen and support each other, even across the distance that must separate us, surely we shall both be the better for it."

With this agreement they parted.

When Ciceley heard, at the end of the same week, that he was really gone, she looked very grave for ten minutes, and said, with a sigh, that "Cambridge was the most disappointing place in the world to live in," since every one that was worth knowing left it every three years, and you had to begin again and again upon new people until you were worn out, and, in your turn, nobody cared to cultivate your society any longer.

"Already, Helen," she said, "I can assure you, I am beginning to find freshmen pall,

and I can almost echo the last speech and confession of that old tutor who died yesterday, 'I have had too much of ~~the~~ boys.'

It was Randal Kelridge's custom to dine very constantly in hall, and on such occasions he was apt to be very late home; but, one evening in the middle of June, Helen had determined, however he might delay, to sit up for him. Not only would the next day be the anniversary of their wedding-day, but it was also the day on which their tenure of Chevington's house actually expired. She had not as yet succeeded in inducing Randal to take the matter into account at all, and he always seemed vexed if she attempted to bring him to any decision. But she was relieved by his returning much earlier than she expected. The clocks had only just struck half-past ten, when she heard him come in.

"Is that you, Randal? I am glad you are back early to-night, for I really want to

speak with you," she said, as soon as he entered the drawing-room. "I have sent the maids to bed; but I meant to sit up for you to-night, however late you might be."

"I had no intention of being late to-night," he said. "I also have to speak with you."

What could he mean? His manner was so ominous that it rendered her doubly uneasy; but she answered cheerfully—

"You see, we must settle something. We cannot go on here like this."

"No, we cannot," he replied. "It is, indeed, high time we settled something. I have taken a year for consideration; but now the time is up."

"Yes, our time here is up, but we might go abroad for the long vacation; that would be very pleasant, I think, especially if we might take Ciceley with us."

"No doubt; with Mrs. Gruter, and a maid, a *coupé lit*, and a hospital nurse for Professor

Gruter, and, possibly, a courier for me to consort with. Also with Dr. Silverhayes to follow after Ciceley! A pleasant programme, truly; better join a Cook's excursion at once. Why will you affect to misunderstand me? That was not what I meant in the least. I was not speaking of this wretched house; but of our miserable lives. We cannot go on with this mockery of a marriage—that is what I mean. You know it, quite as well as I do," he said, with rising nervous irritation. "We must face the question sooner or later. I have been thinking, thinking of nothing else, night and day, for this last year. I have thought until, at times, I have been maddened and confused. Now I ask to know your thoughts before I give you the result of mine."

For some minutes there was silence in the room. Helen had been so utterly unprepared for this; but at last she looked up at him, and spoke plainly.

"Well, Randal, I cannot pretend to say that I have not been very unhappy since I became your wife. You would not expect to hear me say anything else; but it is because you separate yourself from me in all ways —you lead your own life apart from mine; you make me feel that you repent of our marriage every hour of the day. But if you could try and alter, and let us resolve to make the best of our common lot, surely we might find many good things in life if we looked for them together."

He made no answer, only the old familiar sign, of the shuffling of his lame foot on the carpet, jarred on Helen's sharpened senses.

"Any way," she continued, "we took each other for 'worse' as well as for 'better,' and if matters are worse than either of us expected, I don't see what we can do but bear it."

"May I ask, does your past religion or

your present philosophy speak there?" he said irritably.

"Oh, Randal, don't be so cruelly cold," she cried. "Whatever the misery may be, we have got to bear it together; let us try to understand each other patiently."

"That is precisely what I wish and desire," he said. "What am I here for now, but to endeavour to make you comprehend my position, our mutual position? You do not suppose that I have not taken you into account as well as myself; it is how you are affected by our marriage which concerns me now."

"If he really wishes to make me feel that, why not adopt a kinder, gentler manner? How easy it would be then to bear anything with him;" and she expressed the thought in words.

"If I were to indulge myself and you by such facile demonstrations, I should be a cowardly and selfish creature," was the answer.

“Cowardly and selfish, for showing me tenderness and affection, Randal! What on earth have you got in your head?”

“This,” he replied. “I should be both cowardly and selfish to take means to induce you to endure any longer the lot which, you have been good enough to inform me plainly, has been so miserable. I am quite aware that I have made you miserable. It is my wretched fate; and there is no hope of my ever making you, or any one else, anything else. My advice to you, therefore, is to leave me! I said this to you once before; but I had not then had time to see how your life with me really affected you.”

“But you remember what you said, Randal, that you did not really want me to go; I am sure you did not. You confessed that, if I had taken you at your word, you meant to shoot yourself.”

She had risen now, and was standing

before him, with a white, drawn face ; he, as was his invariable habit from his lameness, was sitting in a low chair. His eyes were habitually fixed upon the ground ; not once, whilst he spoke, did his eyes meet hers, not once did he pitch his voice above its accustomed tones ; but there was something far more pitifully tragic in the man's utter self-abasement, than in the woman's passionate pleading.

“ You did not want me to go away and leave you, and I do not believe you do now. So long as you care even ever so little to have me near you, all that I want is to stay ! Why will you pain me by these strange speeches ? If I displease you in any way, if there is anything in which I can alter that will content you better, say so, and let us try to agree ; but do not say these dreadful things again. You distress and frighten me utterly.”

At this moment the lamp, which had

burnt itself out, expired, and left them in the semi-darkness of a June night.

Helen moved across to the large window and drew up the blinds; the room was flooded with moonlight, which bathed her from head to foot, as she stood facing her husband, who sat still in obscurity. A shooting star traversed the heavens, leaving a rapidly fading trail of crimson and gold in its track; several others shot downwards out of the dark blue vault, each pursued by a rivulet of pale, dropping gold. The sight for a brief moment hushed her spirit by carrying her out into the immensities; but the next she was dragged down again by Randal's voice speaking out of the darkness.

“Do you suppose that I say all this for my own pleasure? Have I not thought the matter over painfully, sitting for hours and hours alone in my rooms? Have I not had cause to persuade myself, over and

over again, that it is at once my duty, and the greatest kindness I can do you, to advise you to leave me, to offer to make any arrangement whatever that is in my power to make, and to give you that which you have never asked, namely, freedom to make the best of your life in your own way, delivered from my presence. I think it only fair to make you this offer, and I advise you to accept it. You may consult your brother, if you choose, that is to say, if he ever descends from the seventh heaven ; or may take the opinion of any priest, lawyer, or physician, whichever you happen most to believe in. It's immaterial to me ; they will all alike tell you that I am wicked, mad, or incapable. But one thing I have to add —remember my words—if you do not close with my offer now, I give you no assurance that I shall ever repeat it when a time comes in which you may judge differently. Do you comprehend what I am saying

Helen? You may go away now, frankly and freely. What pleasure can it be to me to see by your face ever before me that I have rendered you wretched by associating your lot with mine? If you were indifferent and careless, and amused yourself independently, it might be different; but you cannot hide from me that your life with me is a perpetual martyrdom?"

"You exaggerate, Randal! You have, indeed, thought and thought until you do not know what you are saying."

He shook his head.

"I will release you now," he continued, "frankly and freely, with every facility I can give you, and every wish of mine for your future happiness!"

"Randal, it is a power you do not possess," she cried. But he continued—

"I have repented of my threat of destroying myself, if you decide to leave me; I have seen that it would not be right to you.

therefore you need not be influenced in your decision by any fear of that sort. I shall live; but I shall cause you no further trouble. But if—attend, please!—if you reject my proposal, and stay with me now, you must not base any future claim upon the present offer. There are reasons which have great weight with me, though you may not see them, for this stipulation."

"Randal," she cried, "I implore you, do not take up that judicial tone! I simply cannot understand what all this means, coming from you. Do you *want* me to leave you? That is the question."

"That is not the question! Upon that point I absolutely refuse to speak, because it is your decision I must have, your free and unbiased decision."

"But *the* important element in my decision must be your state of mind towards me."

"States of mind may perpetually vary, or

be perpetually misinterpreted. Facts are the only important things to consider, in any case; and the question of the balance of your happiness or misery with me can but be decided by yourself."

"Randal," once again she pleaded, "if you would but say that you care for me just a little! Surely you believed that you did before we were married! If you could only confess that you want me to stay ever so little! How can you detach your judgment so entirely from all emotional considerations? How can you have persuaded yourself that you are doing your 'duty' in urging your own wife to leave you? Will you not say one word?"

He shook his head, his eyes were still fixed upon the carpet; but a ray of moonlight touching his face, showed it to have turned deadly pale.

"Transcendental motives, of whatever sort they may be, do not appeal to me," he said;

“if we interpret duty differently that is again a divergence of mental habit, which I deplore, but cannot take into account.”

“Do you want me, or do you not?” she exclaimed, wringing her poor hands together, and then stretching them out appealingly towards him.

For a second or two it was evident that he retained the mastery over himself with immense difficulty, then he replied, in a lower voice than before—

“In some ways ‘Yes,’ in some ‘No,’ the balance is for you to settle. In spite of all you say, it remains true that I am doing my duty, as I have seen it after painful consideration, in what I say. Sceptic though I may be, even from your most liberal point of view, I believe in justice between man and man, and even between man and woman, and I act accordingly. I speak according to my inner sense of right, and I believe that any capable, independent witness

would confirm my judgment—any man, I mean; not, of course, any prejudiced old woman such as Mrs. Gruter, or Miss Silver-hayes. I will not have you consulting them, Helen; mind that.”

“But why should I consult anybody? Let me stay. Let us end this! I will stay! Where have I to go to? What have I to do?”

“No! I will not take your answer now, to be perhaps reproached by you in after years, when you have changed your mind. I will accept your answer when you have weighed the matter deliberately, and have thought over all I have said; but not now. You are excited and distressed. You cannot judge clearly, either in your own interests or mine. Now I must go!”

“Go! Where?”

“Back to my rooms. I have some work to do there. I left so early to-night.”

“And leave me here, all alone, after this?”

“It is best so. Good night!”

“Randal, Randal!” she cried, following him to the door of the room. “Will you not kiss me? What have I done? I have done nothing—nothing whatever to deserve this! You are cruel! My utmost crime has been that I have suffered from your coldness, and that you have seen it, and it has vexed you!”

Again, for an instant, he seemed about to turn; but the next moment he had snatched his cap and gown, and had left the house without replying.

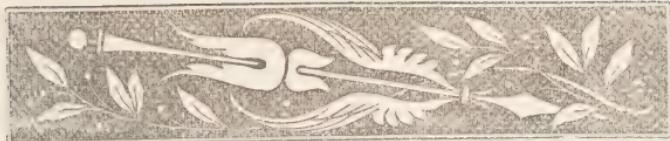
“Oh, God, this is hell!” he ejaculated, as he stumbled and fled from the house, out into the freshness of the midsummer night air, amongst the trees at the “backs.”

Then, all alone, in the darkness, for the moon had vanished behind a bank of cloud, the man who had been so hard and cold staggered in his misery against the trunk of

a tree, his bent frame shaken with sobs like a child's.

If only she could have seen and comprehended !





CHAPTER V.

WHEN Helen was left alone, she took up her station by the window, looking out upon the silent trees and lawns, in a state of dull misery, too intense for the possibility of relief in action. Hour after hour she sat thus. Once she mechanically stretched out her hand for a shawl which lay upon the sofa, since, as the early morning hours approached, it grew cold even on this June night. She was not thinking much; she had nothing further to decide immediately, for she had already resolved to go up to town next day to see Dr. Silverhayes, and to defer any decision until she should have learnt if he

was able to enter into the matter. Her brother was by this time in Australia, she had no one else to consult.

Careful even in detail, she would let the servants know that she had gone to town to arrange about the house; and she would send Randal a line to college to inform him of what she had done. Meanwhile she was crushed. There was so much that puzzled her in the whole affair; she felt that she was acting in the dark. She could only suppose that Randal had brooded over his dissatisfactions until his judgment was not to be relied upon. She was very doubtful of Silverhayes's power of giving her any assistance in the matter, and she exceedingly disliked the necessity of consulting him; but to whom else to turn she saw not. She sat all night almost motionless by the window, then, throwing herself on the sofa, slept for an hour after dawn, took some breakfast, and started off by the early train.

When she reached Dr. Silverhayes's house he did not seem in the least surprised to see her, and presently she found herself, led on by the doctor's deliberate intention, quietly talking to him as though he were already one of the family. In fact, he had at that moment more than one letter from Ciceley in his pocket, in which she had kept him informed, according to compact, of her growing anxiety about her sister's prospects. She had taken the initiative in writing, to the doctor's great joy.

“There is no other house taken”—Ciceley had written—“and there is some talk of their going abroad: but I am sure things are going wrong with Randal. We never see him now, he is always in college; but we hear he is looking horribly ill, and is more depressed than ever. Helen herself is quite changed also; but in a way you would never guess. She has become quite aggressively cheerful, even lively. She has been out to every party all this term, whether he went or not, and has acquired quite a festive manner. In fact, I heard one lady remark the other day that to have Mrs. Randal Kelridge at a dinner-party at once converted it into a success; and another spoke of her as ‘such a bright

creature, so sparkling and lively.' All which does not deceive me in the least. It is the mask she has deliberately assumed to play her part in ; but I watch between the scenes, and I send you a report now, because I think it probable that your time for helping her has come. But you need not send me any answer to this letter ; in fact, I had rather you did not. Meanwhile, I remain,

"Yours to obey,

"CECILIA APPLEWOOD.

"P.S.—Helen and I went together to a soap-bubble blowing party the other day, in one of the college gardens. It was such a comic occasion—ostensibly for children, of course ; but in reality it was patronized by the grown-ups. And you never saw such a funny sight as some of the grotesque figures of the older dons, when, with a pipe apiece, and a bubble between them, they stood at ridiculous angles, gazing skywards at the radiant globes they had created out of soap-suds and glycerine. Helen would not blow bubbles at all, the attitudes were too much for her dignity ; but I put my self-esteem in my pocket, and enjoyed myself immensely, particularly with one elderly don, named Terence Garfoyle, whom we had met at dinner-parties before. In appearance he is a cross between a mediæval saint and a nineteenth-century gargoyle, in reality a priest, a physician, and a tutor. Helen stood by, and held a dish of soapy water for him to fill his pipe, with reverence and rapture. In fact, she confessed she had had a lovely time, just as if she had been one of the little children in heaven, and had been

played with by St. John, and she declared afterwards that Dr. Terence Garfoyle was such a saint, that the most ungraceful and ludicrous feats when performed by him became divinely gracious actions. I don't know why I tell you this; for it isn't the least in your way or mine; but I like scribbling to you, and it may be good for you, with your materialistic conceptions of your profession, to read the praises of another kind of doctor. Let us have a secular soap-bubble blowing party at Milmead Manor-house in the garden some day."

This was the letter that Silverhayes had in his pocket when he lured Helen into conversation. He made no secret of the fact that he had already given her husband's mental and nervous condition his best professional consideration, and the upshot of his advice was that she should take him at his word, to the extent of leaving him, for a time, at any rate. It was probable, in his opinion, that her presence in his present state would affect his nerves injuriously. He was remarkably deficient in those characteristics which render a man a social being. He was manifestly under the influence of a dominant

idea, namely, that his marriage was a mistake, and the fixed impression would work out its own fulfilment unless measures were taken to divert the concentration of thought on one topic. Difficult as it was to explain to her that her absence might be more beneficial for her husband than her presence, yet, in his judgment, it was a fact. Keltridge needed, as it were, an apprenticeship before he could prove himself a gregarious being, before he could come out of his hole in college, and take his place as a member of a wider community. She might return at any future time, when his mind, having regained tone, he would very likely be soliciting her company; but, at the present crisis, since solitude was the only bride her husband wooed, this charmer should have a fair field to weary him of her exclusive society. There was every hope he would tire of her attractions ere long; and there was no need to take it too seriously. Helen

should treat him as she would a child, and not give him too much of a good thing, namely, of her own company, at once.

Helen heard him with gratitude, but without settled conviction. All through his conversation rang the professional note, which necessarily ignores the mental and moral anguish involved in following its prescriptions, and which resolutely keeps the physical aspect foremost. She had sense enough to know that she could expect nothing else from one whose business it was to regard all men and women as "patients;" to whom it was indubitably indispensable to regard them as "bodies," whilst it was quite a voluntary, nay even an inconvenient, hypothesis, to assign to them the possession of souls.

"It is not," he concluded by saying, "as though you were without resources. Mr. Kelridge will, of course, provide for you amply; and your brother will, it is certain,

be prepared hereafter to make a home for you in town. Shall I tell him you have been here? Can I send him any message?"

"No, tell him nothing—nothing about me, please. I must think it all over. I would rather communicate with Chevington myself, when I have made up my mind what I mean to do. Now I must be going back. I have to catch the train."

"Well, I wish I could have given you more satisfaction," he said, as he stood upon the door-step.

"You have given me the results of your best consideration, and I am grateful to you," she answered. But, as a matter of fact, the whole tenor of the conversation had but reduced her to greater depths of despondency. The return journey was infinitely sadder to her than that in the early morning had been. She had suffered too much in having to sit and relate to a comparative outsider the story of her woes, and

in hearing him tell her, in matter-of-fact tones, that, as her husband evidently did not want her society, she had better remove herself out of his way. It was just as though she were a piece of furniture, which encumbered his room, and annoyed him by its fixed interference with his halting progress across the floor, lame man that he was.

To be alone, as she now felt herself to be, to return to a desolate house, to sit down to a solitary meal, to be unable even to face Ciceley or Mrs. Gruter; not to know which way to turn, what to decide or do: to be aware that Randal was carefully avoiding her presence until she should have communicated her decision to him. This was her lot. Presently it became unendurable, and she determined to go down to college and try and see Randal.

When she ascended the dark, narrow stairs, she found that her husband's outer door was

closed ; but she opened it, and knocked at the inner door. He answered the summons with manifest reluctance, and, looking in, she saw three familiar faces sitting round the table, whilst heaps of papers strewed the chairs and floor.

“Who is it ?” said Randal, impatiently. Oh, Helen, is it you ? Do go away, please ! I can’t attend to you now. My fellow examiners are here ; and we are very busy, adding up marks. I am very sorry, but I positively cannot attend to anything just now ; go away, please,” he added, with significant impatience, for, in his secret soul, he feared that the other three, who had no wives to interrupt their vocations, would tell the tale of the much-married man, whose wife haunted his rooms at all hours, even when his door was sported.

There was nothing in this sensitiveness to interruption, which at any ordinary time Helen would have noticed ; but, at the

present moment, his manner, rather than his words, contained a repulse, which went deeper than the trivial occasion motived. She turned away, and left the college in despair, one thought ever uppermost in her mind, and that thought the river; but not the river as she knew it best, where college lawns slope gently downwards to the languid stream, and boats rock lazily on summer days beside the bridges. No, the portion of the river that attracted her now, was some miles further down, where—term being over—scarcely any oars were plied; where the low-lying marshy lands lay bathed in the hot sunlight, and only the cattle looked on from the grazing-grounds on either side the banks, drowsy and satisfied spectators of the monotonous scene. Thither she turned her steps. At her feet the towing-path presented a deceptive margin of mud and ooze, from which the water-fowl held aloof. The day had been sultry from

the commencement, and now threatened a thunder-storm. The rain began to pour in torrents, plashing in the dirty pools which widened every moment in the sodden path at her feet. Not a soul was in sight. The men had all gone down ; she had passed their boats idly moored before the boat-houses, or shelved within them. The towing-path was absolutely deserted, save that in the far distance a dull procession of barges drifted slowly down towards Ely ; but the discordant voices of the men were too remote to reach her ears.

Helen walked on a mile or two towards Ditton Corner, passed the ferry, and then stopped. It was of no use to go any further. There was nothing left to be done ; nothing more to hope or fear ; nothing else to live for. The corpses of her dead hopes, dead loves, lay in the sodden ooze at her feet ; she was blind with looking so long upon their ghastly faces, deaf with listening to the

clamour of urgent voices mocking her despair. She had sent her soul out into the darkness of a vast universe, which, in response to her agonized appeal, had denied the assurance of any ear that heard. "If He exists at all, He is Force, and force is with the strongest, force is cruel; or if, indeed, He is anywhere else to be found, it is in the weakness of pity; pity which sneaks into the heart of a woman, and is utterly unworthy the might of a God." Then, from the vastness of the unknown, she turned to her familiar surroundings. "Why live any longer? For whose sake endure her lot? What could it matter if one woman, more or less, succumbed to a sorrow in which there was no sin? For whose sake should she consent to live?"

Then a strange thing occurred! Straight before her, mirrored in the mist rising from the heated ground, with her back to a split willow, stood Ciceley; Ciceley called up

by Helen's momentarily heightened powers of visualization. Ciceley in her youth, beauty, and radiance, just looking at her sister, and that was all. She did not move from the spot where Helen saw her standing, her feet were still in the ooze, the mist still enveloped her, the rain streamed from her hair ; but it was Ciceley's form, unmistakably outlined as she stood, not speaking, but facing Helen, with victory in her clear blue eyes. Their souls met in an embrace of love, stronger than despair ; yet in her heart Helen knew that, though she had embraced her, the real Ciceley was not there.

It was enough, the temptation was vanquished, such restraining power had the image of Ciceley over Helen's mind. Not the memory of Chevington. No, he would console himself about her loss, as he had done about Margaret's ; the garment of the flesh, to him, being but the veil that hid the soul, by whatever means it were rent, his

imagination would instantly reject the visible wreck to fasten upon the ideal gain. Not the thought of Randal. Ah no! Had he not desired to be rid of her? Would he not even be the better, as she had been told, for her disappearance. It was the idea of Ciceley alone which had the power to soften the mood of angry and indignant despair which had seized her. The anger was against her husband now. What had she done that her lot should be so different to others? Why should this man have taken her at her best, and then flung her off like a useless thing he had no need of? He had cut her off from all other love, from all further hope of a life with husband, home, and little children, and then he had found her in his way, and had advised her to leave him. But Ciceley would suffer so cruelly if she were exposed to a second tragedy after Margaret's death. Ciceley, whose very image, mirrored by love, had assumed

shape in the mist before her eyes. The thought of Ciceley alone held her to life; no physical fear. But what was she to do—how go back? She must have some one to speak to.

“God, if there be a God, send some one,” she cried mentally, then looked up and saw the barge at the ferry already crossing the river with one man on it. Through the blinding rain, she identified the tall ungainly figure of the man who had “blown soap-bubbles to the glory of God,” the man whom she and Ciceley, by mutual consent, spoke of as “St. John.”

She had said in her heart that there was no answer, that from the leaden heavens and sodden earth there was no voice that responded to her cry. She would not have owned it; but, by her attitude, she at once accepted this man’s presence as her answer.

She determined to wait and see which

way he turned. She was on the Ely side of the ferry ; it was late in the afternoon, he would naturally be going back to Cambridge to dinner, in his college hall. If he turned, as he probably would, in that direction, she would not pursue him, she would let him go, and to herself would let befall what might ; but if he turned in the quite unusual direction in all the rain, away from home, then she would speak to him, as to a messenger sent in answer to her need.

She stood a hundred yards away, on the towing path, towards Ely, and she waited. She knew him to be excessively short-sighted, and quite unable to see any object at the distance at which she stood ; so, if he came that way, it would not be because he had seen her. She watched the heavy, awkward barge touch its mooring and discharge its single passenger. Then Dr. Terence Garfoyle lifted his misshapen hat, and raised his large pale face for an instant

towards the dripping heavens, as though to inquire their intention in respect of continued rain; then, grasping his shabby umbrella, he turned deliberately towards her. She drew aside towards the edge of the path; then, when he came up, her courage failed her for the moment. She was inconspicuously dressed in dark clothing, and, short-sighted and abstracted as he was, he passed without perceiving her. Then she repented, and hurried after him.

“Dr. Garfoyle, I want to walk with you a little way, may I?”

She saw at once that he had forgotten who she was, having only met her now and then in university society, and she did not recall her name to his memory, it was too utterly unimportant a detail. The only thing that mattered was that one soul in extremity was about to appeal to another soul for help. He showed no surprise at her sudden appearance, nor at her request;

but acquiesced with kindly courtesy, extending his dripping umbrella over her head, as though therein lay the probable motive of her desire, whilst he carefully accommodated his long strides to her shorter steps.

They proceeded in utter silence for a few yards—it was no moment for trivial speech—then she said, without preamble or introduction—

“Were you ever tempted to commit suicide, Dr. Garfoyle?”

He accepted the question as though it were the most natural one in the world, waited for an instant before replying, and then said, in the same quiet tones in which he had spoken before—

“Yes, once; it was long ago now, when I was a young man.”

Somehow she was aware that she had fully expected this answer.

“Can you tell me what it was for, and why you did not do it?”

Again he thought quietly before replying, then he said—

“Our lives are so inextricably interwoven each with others’ that you may easily believe, without my telling it you, that I was both led to contemplate it, and preserved from doing it, by the love of another.”

“Oh, will you tell me more!” she pleaded. “It will help me if you could.”

Nor was any excuse felt by either of them to be needed for her words, any more than would have been required for the cry for help of one actually perishing in the waters.

“The precise arrangement, or rather disarrangement of circumstances which produced my dismay, it would not profit you to hear, my child; the love that saved me was that which I entertained for a mother long since dead. I knew that it would cause her such horrible pain to have me brought back to her dead, by my own act. It was that thought

which restrained me; but behind the thought lay the divine suggestion of thought, as I afterwards came to see, but not then, not at that time. At that time my soul was in hell, with demons of doubt and despair for its company."

"Ah, and so is mine!" she said. "And were you a clergyman then?"

"No, I was a medical student."

"What was there worth living for when you came back?"

"At first only this, that I perceived everywhere two forces at work in the world, the one that strove for good, combating that which made for evil; and I determined to ally myself with the one that made for good."

"But if you knew good from evil you knew everything! Which of us knows that much, or has ever known it? Life is far more complicated to most of us than that--to most of us who think and suffer. Every question is complicated and confused for most of us

by the errors of the ignorant, the prejudices of the religious, the subtle reasoning of philosophers, the scorn of the intellectual critic! But what next? Tell me practically how did your principle work, for I confess that I cannot see it."

"I found," he said, speaking very deliberately, "that the principle I had adopted worked itself out very simply in all the details of daily experience, resolving itself perpetually into the preference for love of another, consideration of another, over love of one's self."

She did not speak, so he went on.

"There is immense power, too, in waiting, in deciding nothing that lies out of our immediate path, in permitting no excursions to one's intellect or imagination, in settling no question upon any other principle than the one I have already stated, that in all things two courses are apparent, the higher and the lower, and that, as a true man, one

will chose the higher ; for instance, the love of self drives one to self-destruction, the love of another—in our cases, at any rate— forbids us to take that step. Settle all questions upon their immediate issues, and refuse—until you have reached a calmer haven and a wider out-look—to concern yourself with them intellectually."

" But that is narrowing all life and all reason ! Surely there must be wider views which ought to be taken of any subject than that ? "

" Undoubtedly ; but not by you or me at the moments that we speak of. You and I are not concerned with these wider views in the crises of our own personal history. This is the practical answer for us ; let us accept it and pass on, deferring the wider consideration of circumstances, or leaving it to those who have leisure of heart and brain, and have arrived at calmer periods in their later history."

“But,” she objected, “I have sent my soul out into the darkness to seek for the Upholder of Right, and He is not there. I cannot find Him. I have found nothing but force, blind cruel force which crushes a woman at a man’s will.”

“That is but to tell me that your childish faith is crushed by the weight, which it was never meant to bear, of your mature experience. God—as you knew Him in earlier days—exists no more for you; wait, and you will meet Him, since you need Him, in some new aspect, in some better revelation. You may trace everywhere the invariable cycle of birth, death, and resurrection. Your early faith was born in childhood; now it is dead, buried, and lies three days in the tomb. Yet it will rise again in some new and glorified form.”

“But in some cases, surely, it never rises again?”

“Never in this state of things that we

see; but what do we know, pygmies and atoms that we are? What does it matter that our blinded eyes should not witness this or any other resurrection? That need not trouble us. Do we order all things? Does the universe wait for us?"

They walked on in the pouring rain for half an hour, both of them unconscious of its discomfort, and forgetting that they were going away from, and not towards the town. Then he suddenly said—

"We must turn now, or you will take cold and be ill. I had an errand to a cottage on the bank beyond Ditton; but I will take you back safely and return. Dear me! How wet you are! I ought to have seen that before."

"Oh no; do not let me interfere with your work. What does it matter if I am ill? To have one's body suffer instead of one's mind, that is what I always feel would be much better; to be one of those poor

women down in Barnwell, for instance, or in London slums, whose husbands beat them and kick them, and who have to struggle with hunger and poverty, rather than with mental and spiritual wretchedness. ‘When the gods would be cruel,’ it is not in the flesh that they plant a torment, but in the spirit.”

“Hush!” he said. “Hush! Do not dare to say that! I cannot permit it. What do *you* know about their sorrows, or the unutterable things they have to bear? Whoever says such words knows not what he speaks of.”

“I have not been indifferent to their troubles,” pleaded Helen, humbly. “I used to think before my marriage that I would give my life to their service; that I would live among them, and work for them, and care for them; and I did not demand out-of-the-way comforts and consolations for myself. I only thought of a common lot;

just such things as everybody has and as one felt one had a right to. When these ordinary things are all wrong in one's intercourse with those nearest to one, it makes one feel unable to concern one's self about the trials of the poor whom you speak of. I cannot care any longer about their fate. If I consider it at all, it only seems to me infinitely superior to my own, in that its hardships lie in real tangible wants, which can be satisfied by material means."

Her words affected her companion so strongly that he furled his bulging umbrella, and came to a standstill, facing her, in the middle of the sodden path. Certainly this strange man had a fine capacity for righteous anger!

"Because," he exclaimed, "they have wants which can be satisfied by material assistance from us, what right have you to say that their sorrows do not strike them doubly, both in heart and body? Do you

suppose that that woman down there in Cross Street, whose husband tore her new-born babe out of her arms last Thursday, because he grudged the expense of its little life, and dashed its brains out against the iron framework of her bed, suffered in her battered frame only, when he afterwards beat her off him, and left her moaning on the floor? Do you suppose that that poor creature, who got out upon the window-ledge of those high model dwellings to escape the blows of her brutal husband, and who clung on till he beat her hands into a mass of pulp before she fell, and was carried to the hospital, suffered only in her poor crushed fingers and her broken bones? Were their 'common rights' respected, poor souls, and the 'rights' of thousands like them, who are enduring meekly as they endured every day and night of the week? Are even the 'rights' of the little children respected—cursed with

blows, and kicks, and foggings, burnt with pokers, cut with knives, and starved with famine! Ah, well! I spare you the recital of the things they have actually to bear. You gently nurtured women have been spoilt, just by having your rights respected, and your paths shielded on all sides; and the consequence is that, the moment you find yourselves slighted, you experience this surprised sense of wrong. I tell you these others have never had their rights; they have been so accustomed not to have them, that they suffer, without moral indignation, that of which you have no conception! 'Better,' indeed! Easier, indeed, *their* sufferings! Would it be easier to you, my child, to have no home to go back to now; but a grudging admittance to the workhouse, insufficient food to eat, no relations powerful enough to befriend you, and, in place of an absent or indifferent husband, to have to cower before a danger-

ous brute, from whom you had cause to expect every injury and insult that his coarse nature might devise; who might even drive you out to support him in idleness, by means that *you* have never thought of? All this in addition, mind you, not instead of mental anguish. Never say or think that again; and, some day, when you have learnt enough in your own experience to be of any use to them, you will carry out your original and divinely inspired impulse of befriending them. But not yet: you have your own lessons to learn first. Mere advantages of wealth and station give no one a claim to teach the poor. You might, indeed, learn much from them; but you could teach them nothing now. The time has not yet come for you."

Strange to say, never yet had praise brought the healing power that these scathing words of rebuke possessed over Helen's soul. At once they had lifted

her up out of her loneliness and self-centredness, and had placed her, a solitary atom no longer, in the midst of a company of sufferers, who, all alike, endured and were strong in the bond of mutual love and sympathy.

“But, Dr. Garfoyle,” she said, “you have not yet given me any definite advice; we are getting back to the town, and you have not asked me a single question—you do not even know my name.”

“It is true; I do not know your name. I have forgotten it, as I am unfortunately apt to do. But I remember that you stood by me at a party in our college garden the other day, when we were engaged in blowing soap-bubbles.”

“I was your acolyte,” she said.

He smiled. “To my blind eyes,” he added, “those balls of radiant light shining with prismatic colours were soon lost to view; but, to my inner apprehension, the

incense of our breaths, the aspirations of our souls took form in them, and thus became embodied prayers, ascending to Him who shines in suns, and stars, and dewdrops, and in every gem of light, whether blown by our breaths, or glistening on the mosses at our feet. But, pray state the definite point to which you wished to draw my attention before we part."

"The question is, briefly, am I to do as my husband, Mr. Keltridge, suggests, and leave him, just because he feels he has made a mistake in our marriage; not a mistake in marrying me rather than anybody else, but a mistake in marrying at all?"

"What did he propose to you?"

"To leave him."

"Well then, do it. Go for a time. But do it cheerfully, not as an affliction, not as an unreasonable action. It may be, instead of an unreasonable thing, the most reasonable and best arrangement that could be sug-

gested for your future happiness. Allow your husband to be the best judge, since the peculiarities of disposition are his and not yours. But do not make an affliction of it. If it pains you, as, indeed, it must, keep your pain to yourself. You will be all the stronger for it. Go back, and tell him that you believe in his judgment, and will act upon it simply. Make arrangements to pay some visits to your family. Surely you can easily do so. Let him go abroad, if he wishes, with any of his college friends, as he would have done before he married ; and, above all, wait, and be patient. Wisdom, like all other good things, comes to him who waits.”

“ But why should I be the one to give in ? ” objected Helen. “ Why should he have it all his own way, as men always do ? ”

“ Simply because you are the ‘ chief ; ’ by which I mean, the one most perfectly endowed ; therefore it is for you to serve

him, since he is the weaker. You meant to take care of him, and help him, when you married him, I imagine. You had even then that idea in your head, or you would have married a different kind of man altogether, only you wanted to do it in your own way. And now you have to see that, to be of service to him at all, you must give up your own way, at the outset, completely. Go away from Cambridge, and see other places, and meet other people. Write to your husband as often as you will, and keep yourself before his mind as being cheerful and contented. There is no special affliction in a varied, well-provided life, spent amongst affectionate friends. And, in the future"—he paused, as though to emphasize his parting words — "you may yet learn, that the abyss which must be traversed to escape from hell to heaven, has been bridged by the feet of the martyred Christ."



CHAPTER VI.

NEXT morning Helen once more presented herself at her husband's rooms, and this time she found him alone. She told him that she had arranged all their plans satisfactorily ; that she would immediately break up their home at Newnham, and that she proposed to pay a visit to her aunt, Miss Stanhope, with whom she had lived before their marriage. She made no complaints, and invited no demonstrations of affection. She forbore all discussion of their differences, and, having exacted a promise that he would write to her, and given one in return, she kissed him, and departed.

Relief, uneasiness, and embarrassment were all visible in Randal's agitated countenance ; but he returned the embrace, and promised to inform her of his movements.

The effort was successfully accomplished ; but, as she walked back, repressed emotion shook her frame, and it needed all the force of her newly formed resolution to carry her through the details of her work.

“I wish you were not going, my dear ; I wish you were not going !” said Mrs. Gruter, when she went in to wish her and Ciceley good-bye. “Yes, I know you will not permit me a word upon the subject. But I don’t care who advised you ; it’s a mistake. It’s some man’s advice you’re following, not a woman’s ; I’m very sure of that. An excellent man, no doubt, or *you* would not have sought him ; but still, Helen, be warned in time. You do not know what you are doing ! You are utterly ill-advised in the course you are pursuing.”

"I will not have Mrs. Gruter, or Miss Silverhayes, or any old woman consulted," Helen remembered that Randal had said. And she observed how deeply men and women mistrust each other's judgment in questions where matrimonial difference is concerned; and concluded that such questions must be decided for the husband's sake, or for the wife's sake, but that any compromise was impossible. Whilst Mrs. Gruter said no more, but thought—

"Poor girl, she has a passionate nature, which has never been satisfied yet. She has also noble capacities for self-devotion, and that yearning for martyrdom which the maternal instinct implants in the bosoms of the most perfectly endowed women. She will find, in this attempt to obey a call which she takes to be that of highest duty, she is reckoning without the consent of powers, whose force she has utterly under-rated. She has made a mistake in her decision.

but a noble one; and, after all, mistakes stand like milestones along all our roads. The test of character will lie in her conduct through long months or years, when the truth is forced upon her. If she fails she will be an object for sympathy, not for blame; if she succeeds it will be only after long and agonized days and nights, wherein she will have been brought face to face with her error; and then, if she deliberately ratifies her choice of martyrdom, she will be a saint; at present she is nothing but a good woman, who has made a mistake. Just as some men used to be fired with a longing to undertake holy wars, so some women engage in matrimonial crusades for the good of men's souls. There is an attraction to noble natures, such as Helen's, in the very self-denial involved; but to women who have followed the call of such higher behests before they have awakened to the claims of passion, there are terrible risks

in these attempted self-immolations. A woman can safely be trusted to be consistent only when she has fought her battle, and has vanquished herself; not when she is as yet ignorant, as Helen is, of the very existence, or, at any rate, of the power, of the forces which she undertakes to trample upon. A noble impulse prompts her; but impulse alone is insufficient for the task. She has undertaken a work of which she is incapable even of counting the initial cost."

That evening Helen went to her aunt's house in town, and, if she spent the long hours of the night in weeping in her solitary room, not a soul in the house knew it; and, in any case, it certainly would have concerned Miss Stanhope much less than if her pug-dog had been annoyed by a cat.

Some hours after Helen's departure Randal Keltridge sent word to his two proposed travelling-companions that he was ready to accompany them on their

tour abroad. These were two men, Pyrkes, a Fellow of the college, and Fleisch, a sub-librarian in the University library. Pyrkes was known to all his friends and others as "Multiplication-table Pyrkes." He was the man spoken of by MacBee, who might be heard in the intervals of walks, dinners, or even, it was said, in chapel, thoughtfully murmuring advanced figures in the multiplication table, of which he was anxious to make himself complete master up to a hundred times a hundred. But, with a wise avoidance of mental monotony, this innocent and ingenuous man filled all the interstices of his harmless days with the perusal of French novels: and it was noted by his acquaintance that, being a man of absolutely rigid morality, he yet habitually preferred those writers whose works would least stand the test of scrutiny in this respect. So that "Multiplication-table Pyrkes's" yellow-backed library was a joke in the college. About

wider questions he never troubled himself. The precise turn that affairs took at any particular crisis in the Universe, or the University, was indifferent to him. His temper was imperturbable, his habits regular; he had no views, and was an excellent travelling-companion.

The other member of the proposed travelling triplet, Fleisch, was a native of Sächingen, just over the Baden frontier. He had been educated at Freiburg University; and, having been fortunate enough, after a few years' residence in Cambridge, to obtain a minor post in the library, he was now returning to his native frontier, to marry and bring back his betrothed from her father's house at Altkirch. With Randal Keltridge the Badener had one taste in common; that was their love of instrumental music. The concerts given by the military bands attached to the regiments stationed in the towns by the Germans, had all the

attraction of old association for the one man, and the promise of future gratification for the other.

Thus, while Helen was journeying to her aunt's house in town, Randal was cramming a couple of portmanteaux with effects for his journey. His state of mind was not subject to the complications which disturbed Helen's more complex nature. His habit of isolating his own lot imaginatively, even from his wife's, delivered him from many perturbations which rendered decision difficult to Helen: yet he was as abjectly miserable as a solitary man could be.

Before he married he had been accustomed to govern his conduct by one simple rule: "Find out what is best for yourself, and do it;" the difficulty only lying in the prescriptive portion of the aphorism. But now he had deliberately endeavoured, after a year's consideration, to find out what was good for Helen, and, having, as he believed,

found it, he was prepared to act upon it unflinchingly. Unfortunately he had made a mistake in the initial reasoning required, and he had undertaken himself to decide the question of what was for her good, when he should carefully have consulted her. Whilst she was now aware that she could not understand him, he took it for granted that he knew all about her. The results, therefore, where combined action was called for, could not fail to be disastrous, since each arrived at results differing as widely as the processes by which they had attained them. She was perplexed and baffled in her efforts at trying to comprehend a character which possessed a rigidity and completion wanting in her own more mobile nature; he, from want of power to enter sympathetically into another's feelings, utterly failed to comprehend her ignorance of the very premises upon which he based his deductions of expediency.

But the result of their mutual misunderstanding had the same issue in misery to them both. Whilst Helen imagined him satisfied at her departure, Randal was groaning at once inwardly in spirit, and outwardly in body, with acute neuralgic pangs. Presently, unable to bear the physical agony from which he was suffering, he went round to a dentist's, who sent him on to a doctor. There he procured a heavy sleeping-draught, by the aid of which he escaped into unconsciousness, until the gyp roused him for an early train.

When his cab was at the college gates, his portmanteau on the top, and he himself about to take his place inside, he suddenly perceived his sister-in-law Ciceley hurrying along the pavement towards him. Surprised and exasperated, he would have avoided her; but she gave him no opportunity.

Ciceley had learnt from Helen of his

proposed departure, and she had rashly determined to see him off, with a view to sending Helen the latest news concerning him. She had also determined to give him the benefit of her unsolicited opinion upon the matter. So she sprang lightly upon the footboard of the cab, and accosted him with her usual certainty of manner.

“I will drive with you to the station, Randal. Make room for me beside you, and have that bag put outside. I am better company than a portmanteau any day.”

Randal was not at all so sure of that, but he had no choice in the matter. Ciceley was actually in the cab, and there she clearly meant to stay.

“Now, what is your address to be, Randal? You have given it to Helen, of course,” she said, with confidence well assumed, but inwardly absent.

Mentally the victim of intense annoyance, Randal muttered the name of the first

hotel in Paris that came into his head ; and explained that, of course, he intended to write to her sister at the earliest opportunity, adding that he had had a frightful toothache the night before, which had prevented his already doing it.

“Well, now I can write to her, in case you forget it,” said Ciceley coolly, privately thinking, “It was just like him to feel it only in his teeth, when he had driven his wife away ! Fancy the man’s feeling it in a grinder and not in his heart, when he had parted from a sweet wife like Helen ! Ugh ! how I do hate you, my brother-in-law ; and what a mercy it is that you cannot read my thoughts !” And she gave a little shiver, and withdrew into the furthest possible corner that the narrow limits of a hansom cab allowed ; whilst he, for his part, envied the driver his undisputed possession of an outside seat. “Well, and when shall we see you back again ?” she

asked. "Are you going for the whole of the Long Vacation?"

When Ciceley chose to speak in these cold commonplace tones, no one could assign her a conscious existence in a world in which tragedies might happen at any moment, even in the best regulated families. To hear her speak thus was to realize all life as an unvarying succession of duties and dinners, unbroken by disaster, and undisturbed by disease or death.

"It is simply impossible to say at present," he stammered, picking up his crutch, and looking wildly round for some impossible means of escape. How Ciceley did enjoy these evidences of his confusion! "In the matter of the length of our tour, I am very much in the hands of my friends," he continued. "Much depends upon the date of Fleisch's marriage, and upon other arrangements."

Only a moment or two were left ; they had already turned into the station yard. Ciceley was bent on telling him what she thought of his conduct in thus leaving her sister to arrange her life for herself, whilst he went off on a lengthy tour with a couple of male companions. The cab had already stopped, Pyrkes and Fleisch were even now approaching in the distance. Ciceley knew and loathed them both ; in another moment their hated greetings would be sounding in her ears, and it would be too late to speak. She grew desperate. She would make this man feel elsewhere than in his jaws. If no one else ever told him the truth she would. She would speak now, or ever after hold her peace.

" Do you *never* think of anybody but yourself, Randal ? Has it never occurred to you to think of Helen ? " she exclaimed, with flashing eyes, and a voice quivering with hysterical indignation. She had

leapt lightly from the cab ; he was descending slowly, with necessary caution, after her. He recoiled as though she had actually struck him ; but, before he could safely plant his lame foot on the ground, and whilst he was leaning heavily on his crutch, she continued, with excited scorn, which enveloped him and his infirmities in one contemptuous glance, “ Have you *no* love or care except for yourself ? ”

Safely on the pavement, he looked at her coldly and fixedly, with a look which made her quail, and replied, in hard, measured tones, “ None ! nor ever have had, nor ever shall have, save for my wife, your sister, Miss Applewood. I say this to *you*—to you. Do you understand ? ”

The biting words struck upon the girl’s hot, passionate mood like hailstones.

Poor Ciceley ! Here was her punishment. There was deliberate insult in the tone. She turned away with the

full understanding of it rankling in her mind.

“He is not a gentleman! He is not even a man!” she said, in her sore, smarting pride. “If I, a girl, had hit a *man*, he would have disdained to hit back, and so meanly too. He meant to imply that I was actuated by some personal feeling, by some resentful memory of the past, in what I said to him. He wished to inform me that he had never cared for me, even when he made me an offer in the Manor-house garden that spring, and to punish me for showing him how well I appreciated him even then. Poor Helen! He is even far worse than I knew!”

In her excitement she went home to tell Mrs. Gruter all about it. She arrived in the midst of an important domestic crisis! When she opened the dining-room door, and showed her flushed face in the door-

way, she found the professor busily engaged in cleaning the birds' cages, and sobbing over them, as he had never sobbed when his daughter died. A mule bird lay stiff and cold upon the table, and he could not get over it. But beside the little feathered corpse lay a sheet of written paper, and before this paper Mrs. Gruter sat, pen in hand, patiently extending his spectacles to him, and awaiting the moment when he should have dried his eyes sufficiently to see the document which he had to sign.

"You come at a critical moment, Ciceley," she said. "Professor Gruter is about to send in his resignation of the Professorship of Cryptology. I have promised him a new bird when he has done it. Come, Thomas, now let Ciceley see you sign it. You've nothing to do but to put your name here. I've written all the rest."

"She is making me do it," he said, sniffing ruefully. "And I don't understand

it at all. None of the rest of them do it; they all go on till they die. It's premature, my dear—it's premature. My predecessor held office till he was a dozen years older than I am. I haven't been absent for a single day. I am quite prepared to lecture; besides, I've provided an excellent substitute."

"Like marmalade for butter at breakfast," whispered his wife.

"I am not aware," the professor continued, "that I have ever failed worthily to represent my subject! The view you uphold, my dear, is the outcome of that essentially vulgar and commercial spirit which is debasing the representative system of the country."

Mrs. Gruter smiled, and dipped the pen in the ink.

"My position," he continued, "is that of any honourable member of the House. By his presence there he is pledged worthily to

represent his constituency ; but he is not committed to the service of any individual elector. Women don't understand these matters. Their views are narrow and selfish. It's business, my dear, University business, with which you shouldn't interfere. I look at the matter in a less purely personal light. I have my successors to consider ; a precedent of this kind may do incalculable harm. There are principles at stake."

" I don't doubt it, my dear ; there always are," remarked Mrs. Gruter, quietly. " And I prefer to leave them there. In the present instance the matter is clear enough. The University—whatever it may be—is not an almshouse for the shelter of aged persons of both sexes."

" Neither is it," he interposed eagerly, " a commercial academy. You forget that ! I have you there, my dear ! "

" The conclusion of the matter is this," she said ; " I will not have it on my con-

science to allow my husband to mistake a University chair for a feather-bed, on which to spend his declining years. Come, Thomas, you have got to sign it, you know. And you'll be ever so much happier when it is done, and nobody can worry you for information any more, except about subjects which possess a living interest, such as canaries, or fowls."

He groaned, shuffled slowly across the room, and wrote his name laboriously at the place his wife pointed to. Then he passed dejectedly out of the room, and went into the garden. When he was well out of hearing, Mrs. Gruter turned to the girl who stood before her, and, whilst she folded and directed the paper to the Vice-Chancellor, said, with a sigh—

“ It is a great advantage for a woman—you can remember it, Ciceley—to accustom herself to look at her husband from a public as well as from a private point of view.

Now, to me," she added, enfolding the feeble old man in a look which expressed the deep content of years of mutual trust and affection—"to me he is perfectly satisfactory, absolutely lovely, if you like, just as he is now, out there, messing over the rabbits, and if I were like some very good women and wives, I should settle down quietly in a deluded content to knit his socks every day, whilst the University paid for the wool! But, happily, I can hear when I'm not present, and I can see with the back of my head as well as with the front, so my uses are doubled. I can also remember what we said of the old when we were young; and I well recollect the terms in which some of us were accustomed to describe those who were then where we are now. I can recall dinner-parties, at which I was present as a bride, where I have sat silent with amazement at hearing the terms in which the seniors of those

days were described by the men who now occupy their places, at any rate, to their own satisfaction! And from all that I have heard said when I wasn't there, by just such tongues as my own, and seen when I wasn't looking, with eyes as keen as these of mine, I have concluded that, strange as it may appear, I had better knit the socks, and he had better feed the rabbits, entirely out of his own pocket. No one in an official position can dare to say that he may not some day become an abuse. It's as well to remember these little things."

Words with which, as Ciceley plainly saw, the strong spirit read a lesson to its own weakness, and triumphed over its own share in the humiliation.

"I learnt to abound with him when we were young," she added, "and now we are learning how to be abased together. There's a great deal of abasement for the best of us,

as we advance in life, my dear, though you can't comprehend that at present."

But Ciceley surprised her by replying, "To some it is abasement all their days." For she was thinking of Helen; and wondering also a little if her sister and Randal could ever, in their turn, arrive at the perfect union of this elderly couple, which permitted the one to criticize the other as though depreciating herself also, in the absolute security of an affection to which doubt was impossible, and with a comprehension so intimate that it could even afford to simulate misconception.

With her usual acuteness, Mrs. Gruter seemed to follow the younger woman's train of thought, for she said—

"We've outgrown ceremony, you see—my old man and I. But you young ones haven't come to that sort of thing yet; and young people need not be discouraged by the discovery that marriage and manners

cannot safely be divorced. Now tell me about Randal."

"Of all men the most unmannerly," said Ciceley, as she flashed forth her tale—in response to which she got no pity at all; but was warned that she should not have ventured to meddle between a husband and wife. But, upon calmer reflection, Ciceley was glad of the assurance she had extorted from him of his feeling about Helen, no matter how it was worded, and she did her best to dress it up fitly, and send it on to Helen.

Randal himself wrote regularly to Helen every Sunday, and received letters with equal regularity from her in return. But his letters were a formal relation of his very moderate doings as a traveller—would have been unworthy a place in any guide-book, and certainly were not furnished with any personal interest. So matters went on to the end of the Long Vacation.

At that period Ciceley and Mrs. Gruter were sitting peaceably together one day, when they were surprised by a call from Mr. Pyrkes "disguised," so Ciceley was pleased to say, "as a gentleman." He came to inquire if they had any recent tidings of Randal Keltridge. Muttering forty-seven times forty-nine ineffectually several times, in the vain endeavour to recollect the result, he managed to make them understand that some uneasiness was to be felt on the subject, and that it would be desirable to communicate with Mrs. Randal Keltridge.

Helen had, it seemed, telegraphed to him in college more than once during the last fortnight, asking for her husband's address, and he wished to explain that it was not in his power to give it. They had parted company at Altkirch, three weeks before, on the day preceding Mr. Fleisch's wedding. Keltridge had, he said — smiling apolo-

getically—expressed a decided preference for funeral over wedding ceremonies, especially when the wedding was to be a German one, with its noisy speeches, its effusion of sentiment, its universal tears, and embraces. For his own part he, Mr. Pyrkes, had also avoided the ceremony, and had returned home; he might have added that, as he wooed and won a bride in the heroine of every novel that he read, he was indifferent to further excitement and variety.

Mr. Pyrkes had parted from Randal in Altkirch and had not heard of him since. But that morning he had received a telegram from Fleisch, which he handed to them, stating that an Englishman had been arrested at Belfort, and suggesting that it might have been Kelridge. There were letters lying upon his college table, and there were matters of college business awaiting his return, and Mr. Pyrkes would be glad to be favoured with an address as soon

as the family had received one. From his manner, he clearly suspected that something or other was wrong.

Ciceley immediately announced her intention of going up to town to see her sister.

“But isn’t it just like him,” she said to Mrs. Gruter, “to take himself off, on some pretence or other, just when the Vacation is over, and he ought to be returning to his work and to Helen?”

As far as she was concerned, Ciceley could have dispensed with her brother-in-law’s presence well enough; but, for her sister’s sake, she felt decidedly uneasy.

“Why couldn’t he have returned with that discreet Mr. Pyrkes, and have saved all this worry?” she said. “And such exasperating worry, too; for here we all are, at such a distance off that we can know nothing about what he is doing; and we are such a helpless lot of English people, too, without an idea between us as to how to act.”

When Ciceley arrived, she found Dr. Silverhayes in Miss Stanhope's drawing-room ; and her greeting was as warm as the heart of maiden could desire. She had not seen the doctor for three months ; he had not been down to the Manor-house during the Long Vacation ; and Ciceley had secretly asked herself if there could be any new motive under his apparent avoidance of her society. Now she was indebted to Randal's disappearance for this opportunity of meeting him. Somehow, though she was the bearer of ill news, Ciceley could not feel altogether unselfishly miserable.

She was deeply sorry for Helen, and she quite dreaded telling her the news, if news it was to be to her, that Randal seemed to be somehow missing ; but she could not, for her own part, help feeling the world a promising place, so long as Dr. Silverhayes's every trivial action breathed joy in her coming and moving delight in her presence. She really liked

him so much better since she had not seen him for three months, and no one half as nice to her had crossed her path meanwhile. What a pity he was not her ideal! But Ciceley was not quite so sure as she had been, when she stood with Margaret and Helen in the Manor-house garden in the spring of three years past, that any ideal whatever could be a thing of the present. What if it always belonged to the future, and what if the notion that you could overtake it had been as absurd as the childish pursuit of the rainbow?

Her experience had widened since those days, and she now began to suspect that she had confounded her girlish dreams of an imaginary lover with the very love itself; and she wondered whether, in discarding the visionary robe in which her hero was to appear to her, she might not tighten her actual grasp upon the ideal love itself. She was more approachable and less positive

than she had been even a year ago. Her share in Margaret's death and in Helen's troubles had rendered her more sympathetic, less sure of herself and of others. And to-day, with this fresh sorrow to share with Helen, with the eloquence of Silverhayes's affection pleading with her heart, and the touch of his strong love resting upon her spirit, Ciceley was like a flower, stirred by the winds, beaten by the rain, yet lifting up its lovely head to heaven, and rejoicing in the glory of the sunshine which rested on its beauty. Compared with this her earlier state had been as that of the same blossom, grown in a corner of the greenhouse, shielded indeed from adverse winds, but, by the same precautions, cut off from the vitalizing stream of unimpeded light.

Dr. Silverhayes was sincerely concerned in the matter of Randal's disappearance, and all the consideration of the question which had any promise in it came from him.

Helen was in their old schoolroom upstairs, and, when Ciceley joined her here, Helen saw at once that something had excited her, that she was anxious and agitated, yet not all unhappy; and, hearing that Silverhayes was below, she immediately connected the change that she saw in Ciceley with his name. She had been keeping her own anxiety about Randal to herself, from an instinctive feeling that any publicity given to his affairs would cause him intense annoyance, and knowing that he might well postpone writing to her without anything serious having happened. She did not expect to hear news of her husband through Ciceley, and when the latter confessed that her errand had reference to his disappearance, Helen's first feeling, after the immediate shock of alarm, was one almost of relief, to hear that anything so commonplace as an arrest at Belfort was suggested as having happened to this sad and melancholy husband

of hers. It might have been something so very much worse. That something which she lived in terror of hearing, in spite of his parting assurance that he would do nothing rashly to shorten his days.

Helen's imagination had already conjured up scenes wherein the jealous military discipline of the German frontier ordered the stranger to be shot as a spy. She said little, but sat with a white, rigid face, whilst the others discussed the matter, and finally agreed that Silverhayes should proceed the next day to the spot, there to make inquiries as to Randal's movements after he had parted from his friends. In reality, Helen believed that Randal had gone away in order to be rid of her, doubting if he might not even prefer permanent banishment to her society. All her previous sorrows now seemed to her such unsubstantial things, compared with the new torture of aching dread. She now felt as if nothing

mattered if only she might have Randal back again, in comparatively sound health and comfort, to watch over and take care of.

Ciceley, nothing loth, arranged to remain in town with her sister until further news should reach them. Soon they heard that Silverhayes had obtained access to the prisoner in the fortress-prison at Belfort; but that it was not the man he sought, nor could he obtain any information concerning him, except that he was supposed to have returned to his own country.

With this dearth of news the doctor actually returned to London in the course of a week. When the cab stopped, Helen, who had been growing terribly nervous in the uncertainty, lingered outside the drawing-room door; she could not descend further, and she clung to the banisters as she leant over. She seemed to feel and know, to have felt and known all along, that Randal would not be there. There

was an ominous stillness as the door closed, and the rest of the party entered the dining-room. Then Silverhayes returned, in a few seconds, with his professional air—the air that he wore in his patients' houses when he had to utter the death-warrant of their hopes.

“Your husband has not come yet, Mrs. Silverhayes. No doubt he will appear very shortly,” he said, approaching her with tender boldness.

But even whilst he was speaking, he saw, by her blanching lip and trembling frame, that she was unable to control herself further, and his effort to make her hear words of hope was scarcely successful, before she fell into his strong arms, insensible. He bore her to her room, where he was immediately followed by Ciceley, who was enraged and indignant against the extraordinary being who was her sister's husband, and also against their indifferent aunt.

“Really,” she subsequently said to Dr. Silverhayes, “I protest there are other virtues beside resignation, and that one likes them all to have a turn in time. I maintain that, under these circumstances, indignation takes the precedence, morally. People who are so resigned in their own affairs, are so dreadfully apt to be resigned for other people as well. Latterly Chevington used to vex me that way. Why aren’t you more indignant at Randal Keltridge’s desertion of my sister? I only wish that I had gone after him. I’d have found him, wherever he was, and made him come back with me, too.”

But even as she spoke, the light changed in her flashing eyes, for she suddenly remembered the scene in the cab, wherein she had tried to influence Keltridge, and she remembered that she had distinctly got the worst of it, and blushed at the remembrance:

“At any rate, I will take care to make it thoroughly uncomfortable for him whenever he may choose to return,” she said, more mildly. “I don’t believe, Dr. Silverhayes, that any one else in the family has quite got their wits about them, except you and me. We set our wits, like our watches, to tell us the present time of day; they all look to theirs to record the hours of eternity.”

“And am I ‘in the family’?” he said, smiling. “I only wish that I were, and then I could help you better. At any rate, I set my watch to count pulses, and I must be off now, on my afternoon round. Take care of your sister, and I will come in and see her again this evening. At what time does Miss Stanhope retire, may one ask?”

“She will collect her bag, her shawl, her pug-dog, her spectacle-case, and her maid at nine, precisely,” said Ciceley.

“Then I shall not be at liberty until that hour.”

“But what if she collects me too? She may, you know.”

“Rebel,” he answered. “Have you not boasted of your powers?”

“But I may prefer to go to bed too.”

“Very well; if you do I can wait. I am a very patient man—it is in my profession; but I am also a very decided one. I have never had any thought, or idea, or intention for these three years past, than to say that which I shall thank you if you will let me say to-night.”

“Oh, I do not know if I shall leave Helen’s room again to-day! Do not raise any new questions, please, Dr. Silverhayes. It is not a good opportunity. I really must return to Helen.”

But Ciceley’s face showed signs of relenting, in a sudden shower of lovely blushes; and he, for whom every arch word,

and every soft blush of hers, possessed a significance that was all its own, wondered he had been able to hold his peace so long, and then and there determined that this time her will should yield in subservience to his own. The determination must have shown itself in his lofty attitude as he turned to leave her smiling presence; for she suddenly called to him to "stoop," as he passed through the doorway of the room.

"Why stoop?" he turned and asked, his eyes responding to the spell which bewitched him. "The doorway is full eight feet high."

"You have grown so tall since you came in," she said. "You will soon have outgrown my recognition. Positively I shall not know you, if you come to-night."

"Then I will stay now," he answered, recrossing the floor, and bending down to her as he stood by her side. "You did

not give me your hand. I have not been properly dismissed."

He felt that he might never have such a happy opportunity again, as in Ciceley's present softened mood. He grasped her hand ; she suffered him to keep it, and he, who had so long noted the indications of her slightest word and action, knew, with all a lover's certainty as he drew her towards him, that this beautiful woman was won at last.

He had seen all denials melt out of her sweet face, as he stood at a distance ; but, now that he leant over her, her face was too near his own, he could not read it closely, as was his wont. But she left her hand in his, even though he retained it as the promise of a further gift, which he was not slow to claim from her sweet lips. Then she snatched herself from his embrace, and left the room.

" This evening ! " he cried ; and she re

sponded by a silence that was eloquent enough.

With a fluttering heart Ciceley hastened upstairs to Helen's room.

The sisters were a strange contrast. The death of hope was in the one face, the birth in the other. Happiness made Ciceley's manner more eager, as sorrow rendered her sister's slower than usual. Helen mutely held out a letter.

"It has come," she said; "it has just come. I did not believe he would go quite away without letting me hear. And I am glad he has written. He could not help it. It is not his fault. He has gone to America. He sailed from Hamburg. He never returned to England. I was sure he had not. He meant to have written before he sailed, but the boat was on the point of departure, and——"

"And he had the toothache, I suppose," said Ciceley. She knew it was wrong, but she could not help it.

Helen rose, and folded up the letter.

“Forgive me, Helen; go on, and tell me all about it. What does he say to you? That he has been sea-sick, I suppose. But, pray, why did he not come back?”

Then Helen explained, in a toneless voice. “He feels that he cannot. He says he wishes to travel. He is unnerved. He thinks of a sea-voyage, a year’s travel. He may join Chevington in Australia, perhaps.”

“A year! And you—what does he mean you to do?”

“Oh, I have not yet had time to think of that!” she said, in a faltering voice. “After all, I am not exactly surprised, Ciceley. I knew, of course, that he was out of health and spirits; and this last year has tried him much. In fact, he admits that he cannot return to Cambridge. You know how sensitive and reserved he is. He feels that he would be observed and discussed; he cannot come back now until

the whole thing is forgotten. Oh, Ciceley, do not criticize him!" she entreated, with a faltering voice. "You only give me pain by so doing. It may be the best thing that he could do. You cannot understand him. You do not know him, any of you. He is a difficult man to know, and a more difficult man to love; therefore none of you are capable of judging of his motives or actions."

"May I not speak to Dr. Silverhayes about it, when he comes again to-night? Surely he understands Randal as well as any man can, Helen. And he would do anything he could."

Helen forgot herself in an instant, and glanced at the bright, self-revealing face before her. Her look brought the colour to Ciceley's cheeks, and filled her eyes with tears. Then, unable to restrain the mingled emotions which possessed her, the girl turned and left the room.

That evening she sat on the drawing-room hearthrug alone, but companioned at heart. Miss Stanhope's heart had long been withered ; Helen's was widowed. She alone had springs of joy welling up within her, for expectation of her lover's ring, of his step on the stairs of the dull South Kensington house. But when he came she did not turn her head, till he, coming up behind her, took her fair head in his hands, and turned her face towards him.

“ I have waited three years,” he said, “ to read my welcome in this sweet face, and now I will wait no longer. Give me the assurance of it now, and make it one worthy of you and of me.”

“ To command thus is to make a rebel of me at once,” she replied. “ I am no patient to be coerced by authority.”

“ Nay, nay ; look at it like this,” he said, taking up his position on a low chair beside her, and laying his hands on her shoulders

to compel her to lean against him. “ Think it well over. Has it not been you who have displayed the rigid will? What has it been but your will which, all along, has kept my lips closed all these years till now? Speak, confess! What have I been but the slave of your will, my queen? Accuse your own will and not mine.”

“ Who serves, rules,” she said. “ But you really are not my ideal, Dr. Silver-hayes—well, Unwin, then—and I have always declared I would wait all my life for my ideal. I shall have to idealize you,” she said, looking up shyly; “ and, do you know, that will be difficult ? ”

“ But, since you really are mine, Miss Applewood—Ciceley, I beg your pardon—what does it matter? Two people cannot both combine their ideals, I should say; though I must confess to considerable ignorance—call it scepticism, if you prefer it—upon the subject of ‘ ideals ’ at all. I

don't know what they are. I never saw one, that I know of. If not purely imaginative conceptions, the ideal always appears to me to be the other girl for the man, and the other man for the woman. But I shall like to be idealized myself very much ; it will be very nice. When is it going to begin ?"

" Well, anyway I'm not quite satisfied, you know," said Ciceley, shifting her position, so as to face him and look up in his smiling eyes.

" But I am," he said confidently ; " so, if you will be good enough to tell me what is unsatisfactory to you, together we may be able to alter it."

She hesitated. " I am afraid to marry anybody, after the example of poor Helen's marriage, and what has come of it. You see, we have had two such unlucky marriages in our family already."

He looked grave for a moment ; then, stooping towards her, said—

“I do not often speak my deepest feelings, Ciceley ; but, by my soul, if I did not know myself fitted to make your life happier and better to you than that poor wretch has had the power to make your sister’s, I would never have crossed your path again, after the first day I met and loved you. As to your brother’s marriage, I scarcely like to hear you name that in the same sentence as ‘unlucky ;’ though, for my own part, I believe that we shall realize a happiness as great as was his and his wife’s, and yet prove it not too perfect to endure. There are nice wholesome shortcomings in us, my darling, which I feel will prove correctives to perfection.”

She laughed, and placed both her hands in his. He drew her into his arms, and they were silent for awhile. Then he said lightly, since descend from these heights they must—

“Never fear ; we will make a success of

it, Ciceley. The confident always are petted by fortune, and I have not one fraction of fear or of doubt to face ; neither have you, my princess, in any circumstances of which I can be cognizant."

" And when we are married, shall we take care of Helen, Unwin ? "

" Be sure we will," he answered. " Have I not been taking care of her, of Chevington, and of her queer husband too, for ever so long already, for your sake ? We shall have happiness enough over to wrap them all in some rags of comfort, surely. I decline to embrace your aunt and the pug-dog in my scheme of married happiness. But, if it pleases you, by all means offer Helen a home ; only, if you mourn with her, I stipulate that you shall rejoice with me. I am about among sick people, and sad people, all day long, and I do not like affliction ! It's my business, as it is every doctor's, and ought to be every wise man's

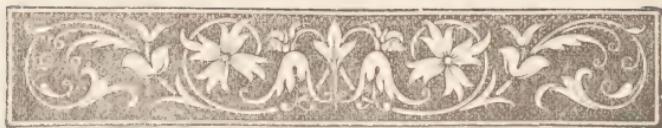
and woman's, to go about the world, breathing out courage and health. Afflictions are like physical ailments, half of them had better never be alluded to. Unmentioned, they would cease to exist. Sympathy is a dangerous and much-abused drug in unscientific hands ; it's a valuable agent, very, but only as strychnine is valuable, when administered wisely, in infinitesimal doses, for strengthening purposes. If Helen comes to us, we will not treat her as a forsaken wife, or a practical widow. We will take it as a sensible and good arrangement that Randal should travel for his health for a year, and we will not allow it to be discussed as a misfortune. Things are what you name them, greatly."

"You are intolerant of misery to-night, Unwin," said Ciceley. "You forget that, if Helen's sorrow is to be snuffed out by silence, your joy may similarly be extinguished."

He smiled, and made answer. "When you take yourself from me, my queen, I will swallow my own prescription. Till then, I magnify my pride in your possession, by proclaiming my triumph in my treasure."

For the rest of the time that Ciceley consented to stay with him, the physician was lost in the accepted lover.





CHAPTER VII.

AWEN he first left Cambridge, Randal Keltridge's mind was a blank as to any future plans. Beyond two or three months' foreign travel he had no definite intention of remaining away from his work and his wife; but each day, as it passed, only increased his perplexity. All the reasons which had contributed to make domestic life intolerable to him at the beginning of the time had equal force at its conclusion. But what further course to pursue he was unable to decide; and he finally embarked for America upon a momentary impulse, such as left him no leisure to account to himself or to Helen for his conduct. But he

wrote to her, immediately upon his arrival, a miserable letter, full of halting excuses ; that letter which she found it impossible faithfully to translate to Ciceley. And he continued to write, at stated intervals, dry, uninteresting letters, containing a brief relation of his travels, and a bare report of his well-being.

What he really suffered at first in mind and body these letters never betrayed. He spent whole nights leaning against the table in his hotel room, with his head buried on his arms. Dozing at length out of sheer exhaustion, he dreamt of Helen. She was in reality the first human being that he had ever learnt to love, although he had separated himself from her at the dictate of a morbid imagination, which had persuaded him that between them lay some insurmountable barrier, and that it was for her happiness that he should do so. He had learnt no language of love, written or spoken ; he was unable to give expression to the feelings which absence awakened in

him. In his unhappy, solitary life he had acquired no terms of endearment ; but now, in the remoteness of his lonely hours, Helen's image seemed to come and visit him. In sleep he seemed to feel the gentle pressure of her hand upon his shoulder, and to be aware of her kiss upon his cheek. He turned to entreat her, but she did not answer ; to draw her towards him, but his arms enclosed the empty air. With a groan the sleeper woke, and the sweet hope fled for another day, or lifetime—which it was to be he knew not.

Yet, in all this, he still held himself to be the victim and not the agent. His belief in the supposed necessity for their separation remained as strong as ever. He was still unable to conceive that he had any choice in the matter.

But Randal learnt much in those days and nights of misery. He learnt that, beyond all doubt, he loved his wife as he

had never thought it possible for him to love any human being. But he did not learn how he was to [show this love of his to her, what proof he should give her of it in writing ; nor did it dawn upon him that, in forbidding her to share his lot, because it was one of suffering, he had sinned against her love for him. But the longer he stayed away the more impossible it seemed to him to return. In time he became accustomed to his wandering existence, and insensibly gained benefit from it.

Not until Randal had been gone above a year and a half did Chevington Applewood seem to realize his sister's forsaken condition. Helen always wrote to him cheerfully from her aunt Miss Stanhope's house, whenever—as rarely happened—she and Ciceley received an address to write to ; and he had simply accepted her statement, that Randal was travelling for his health.

But Ciceley at length grew irritated,

beyond the bounds of her very limited stock of patience, at Chevington's apparent apathy. She had already expressed herself in strong terms of disapproval of the state of mind which led him to be too readily consoled on others' account as an outcome of resignation on his own; and she contrived about this time to make her opinions felt in her letters to her brother.

Chevington was, at the time that he received the letter which first riveted his attention, camping out with the colony of American spiritualists, whose practices had attracted him to visit them. The life he was leading was of the roughest and most primitive; the barest necessities had all to be procured by their own exertions. But, under these conditions, Chevington found himself freer to create his own mental environment than he could ever be in the old life, circumscribed by custom, and limited by the convenience of the many.

Ciceley's appeal on Helen's behalf reached his dormant but still vital sympathies ; and, by the earliest date possible after its receipt, he flung himself on board ship, and, returning to England, hastily took a furnished house in town, and installed Helen in it as his companion and counsellor.

But his somewhat prolonged absence was not without effect upon their mutual relations. Helen found it impossible to bridge over a certain ravine of reserve which had opened between them. She could not talk to him of her husband, save in general or even misleading terms ; the moments in which she could have consulted her brother as to her own difficulties lay in the past, needing a fresh crisis to produce them again under their present changed conditions of intercourse. And Chevington, on his part, also refrained from allusions to that past which it was evident engrossed no less of his time and thoughts than it had ever done. Helen specially

noticed, though she carefully forbore calling attention to her observation of his habits, that her brother's old attraction towards any scene of fire remained apparently in full force. He grew restless and uneasy towards nightfall, and, in an almost shamefaced manner, would slink out of the house, returning frequently only in the early morning hours, with a strong smell of fire-smoke upon his clothing. No one, who has a taste for conflagrations in so great a city as London, need leave the morbid fancy ungratified ; and Helen soon became painfully aware that, perfectly normal and healthy as her brother's condition appeared in all other respects, his mind was even more deeply than ever under the fixed impression of the visions which he had seen, and which connected the loss of his wife, and his hopes of reunion with her, with the scenes of fire.

Two years after Randal had left her, Helen found herself sitting alone one day at

the window of a seaside lodging in a Yorkshire watering-place. Chevington had been unable to tear himself away from the fascinations of fire in the London streets. Strange as the special form of attraction was, Helen had yet had no cause, during the six months in which she had now kept house for him, to regard this peculiarity of her brother's as anything but a harmless and pathetic eccentricity. Hence she had felt no uneasiness in leaving him for awhile to his own devices. By day he was as active and as energetic as ever, filling the hours with useful and philanthropic endeavours, speaking but little compared with his former habit of easy conversation ; but, withal, with one reservation, as satisfactory and normal a member of society as well might be. So Helen had taken her own departure.

Ciceley and her husband were also out of town. They had carried a new and precious Silverhayes, to enchant the eyes of the aged

godmother, who dwelt in the venerable house which the shades of its ancestors had consecrated. And Helen was glad to be alone with the thoughts wherein she trusted to find the hope of ultimate healing for her widowed soul. Troubled a little, perhaps, in spite of her sympathetic affection for her sister, by the too near observation of the perfected embodiment of a happiness which afforded so striking a contrast to her own desolation, she had not been unthankful to withdraw to the freedom of a solitary abode, for a season.

And here it was that, one day, a startling letter from Randal reached her. He had been for a voyage round the world, but was again in America. In this letter he briefly announced his intention of returning to England at once; and requested her to let him hear that she would be ready to meet him in Cambridge on his arrival. There would, he said, be just time for him

to receive her answer before he took his passage by the boat he had selected. The letter was peremptory and unapologetic. No doubt ever appeared to have crossed his mind of her readiness to come and go at his will and pleasure. Her previous subordination to his wishes had fostered this spirit in him.

But a change had come over Helen's attitude in the long months he had left her to consider, in undisturbed solitude, their mutual relations. She had passed through that which had changed all things, both in and around her. Since he had left her, she had taken a wider outlook upon life. New interests and fuller sympathies had touched her. She had also learnt the necessity of being able to act for herself, independently of Randal ; to provide for the exercise of faculties which met with no response in his nature. Never again would it be possible to her

to place her fate unreservedly in his hands as before. She might, indeed, voluntarily devote to his service powers which she would never have acquired had her life been but the completion of his ; but henceforth she must possess her own soul. She might become his best friend, and his helpmeet ; but never again the mere minister of his will.

Then came Randal's unceremonious letter. Now, when she had lost all the confidence with which she had embarked on life with him ; now, when a union dominated by his rigid nature seemed to offer her no hope of happiness ! Why could he not have stayed with her, as she had besought him to do at first ; or, having left her, should he not consult her disposition towards him, as to his return ? A reaction against her former submissiveness led to a revolt as instinctive as it was strong. She took up her pen, and wrote, purposely

giving herself no time for reflection, beating back all softer suggestions, which she knew would presently arise to plead his cause in her heart, by the reiterated self-assurance that, indeed, she "did well to be angry."

"You leave me all alone for two years," she wrote. "You pick me up, and throw me down again. What am I, that I should be worn or discarded, as you please; to come or go, to be taken or left, just as it suits your inclination or caprice? Now I say to you that I will not come. You left me in misery and anguish. When I begged you, you would not stay with me. You parted from me with scarcely a word of consideration. You have written me formal letters without a syllable of tenderness, for more than two years. And when I have vanquished all the hopes that I started with, and have accepted my solitary lot at your bidding; when I have followed your will in all the details of life

have uncomplainingly accepted your decisions, and have defended your departure before every one; when, again, my brother and I have settled down to our life together, you say, abruptly, that you intend to return, and expect me to welcome you back at any moment that you please to appear, as though your absence had in reality been that which I have—for your sake—professed it to be, a necessity prescribed for your benefit. There may be circumstances in life, in which it is simply a duty to live a lie. As a general proposition I am not prepared to defend this assertion; but this, at any rate, I can affirm, that I have acted upon it, in our particular case, however much, at times, it may have cost me. But I decline to extend my compliance to 'any lie,' and I am not prepared to play the changed part you now assign me. Now I will have my life for myself. The gift of my life, which I gave you, you treated

as though it were valueless to you. So be it: valueless let it remain. Do not, however, affect to misunderstand me; that life, which I would have shared with you, will never be shared with any other. But I claim for it other meanings, and other ends, besides fulfilling yours; therefore I will not come. My brother has lately returned to England again for a lengthened visit, and I have taken up my abode with him."

When she had written thus, lest she should repent—as she foresaw that she should do, since the letter was the result, not of self-conquest, but of the conflict of her whole nature—she hastened out to post it immediately. Then she awaited for the next three weeks the result of its receipt, to be discovered by the reply. She spent the monotonous days unhappily enough; all her peace was gone, and she was a prey to self-abasement and disgust. Not that she had changed in her opinion of the

nature of the circumstances ; but that she was well aware that the temper of her letter was likely to arouse Randal's irritable anger. Such dealing with the situation was, she soon felt, unworthy of her former position, and but little likely to represent worthily the motives which had inspired her ; but she had succumbed to the rare luxury of being very angry. A tempest may well be an occasional necessity to a good woman, as well as to the finest weather. It was her only comfort at the time ; and, poor consolation as it was, she hugged it, and made the most of it. She had found no friends in this seaside place, and to Ciceley's and Chevington's letters, which invited her return to town, she sent replies in the negative. She preferred to be out of the way ; she would not go to any place where Randal, upon his arrival in England, might count her presence a concession to his claims.

As soon as it was possible for her to receive an answer, the answer came. In it her husband wrote boldly that he had his "rights;" and that he had foreseen something of this sort when he offered her her freedom at the end of a year of their life together. He reminded her that he had warned her then, that if she did not accept his offer to leave him when it was made, a time might come when he would refuse, as he refused now, to listen to any plea of the sort. In brief, he insisted, and intended to insist, upon his "rights."

The letter was perfectly hard, selfish, and cold, from beginning to end. Until this moment, Helen had been hoping for some door of escape, and had instinctively, therefore, postponed facing the situation as it now offered itself to her. It did not seem possible that there should be no remedy, no escape from the unmanly tyranny of this weak and jealous nature. She believed

that she knew full well that it was not the loss of her society that Randal feared ; but his own loss in the estimation of others, if it were known that she declined to return to him. Hitherto she had, as she herself expressed it, decided that there were circumstances in life which made it an act of heroism to live a lie ; but if, for her own sake, she should now decide that the time in which to refuse such a concession had come, it would certainly be the worse for him in the eyes of the world. Hence, she imagined, the motive of his determination. She had no reason to suppose that he would consider any but himself in whatever line of conduct he chose.

Then she took her misery down to the seashore, for it swelled within her heart too urgently to be endured within the walls of the narrow house. A strong gale was blowing, bringing in a mighty sea ; billows with grand white crests came sweeping

landwards, and the force of the wind was so great that she could hardly stand. She clung, beaten and buffeted by the gale, to the iron railings beneath the pier. Nearer and nearer the waves advanced in mountains, till she grew dizzy, ceased to distinguish between sea, earth, and sky. Then the aching consciousness of herself and of her own lot in a strange new way dropped from her. Her senses swooned, and the mighty mass of waters rolled on nearer and nearer. She sank down upon the stone parapet of the iron supports of the pier. Were it swoon, or trance, she had no longer any power of individual motion ; her insignificant body became, to her own apprehension, but one bubble tossed on the mighty bosom of the deep. But mentally she passed into a state in which she felt her narrow personality inspired by the glorious conditions which environed her, seeing for itself new destinies, aware of new capacities, as she had never

been before. Then the sense of separate identity, growing one with that it gazed on, was merged in it, and she thought no more, but ceased, in an ecstasy of rest, to exist at all.

From a distance one man had been watching her anxiously, as she stood alone amidst the tempestuous scene, and when she sank down, beaten by the spray from the snow-crowned crests of the waves, he hurried forward to assist her. She did not see him, for her eyes were closed ; but, after an interval, whether longer or shorter she knew not, she was aware that some one was raising her up, and was asking her, speaking to her by her own name—

“ Are you better now ? The wind fairly beat the breath out of you, did it not ? You are not strong enough to be abroad on such a day as this. Why, you might easily have been washed away into the sea—the waves come right over the jetty—if I had

not seen you, and led you back to a place of safety. Where are you staying? Let me take you home?"

And as Helen could not yet gather up her strength for a reply, he went on—

"Do you not know me, Mrs. Keltridge? My name is MacBee."

Indeed, she had not as yet recognized him. That indefinable change had passed over him which distinguishes the man from the youth. He looked "finished," older, better-looking; but his manner, on the present occasion, had even more of the old, tender protection in it as he offered her his arm, and led her gently away. It was the same voice, the same manner which had made Helen say formerly, that the women whom he cared for were to be greatly envied.

"Yes, do not try to speak, pray," he said. "Just indicate the direction in which you wish to go. I know exactly how you feel;

it's a most horrible sensation, that of being knocked into next week. It has often been my own fate at football. Here you were the ball, you know, at the mercy of the wind, and you would soon have been at the mercy of the waves too, if, happily, I had not been coming along the shore. I am down here with my mother and sisters; but I don't let them out on such a day as this."

Perhaps any lapse of consciousness makes a new birth into life, no matter how brief the interval occupied; for, since it is a state in which time is not measured by hours or moments, this moral birth may be as complete in a moment as though years had gone to the renewing. Such a change had passed upon Helen since she had stood facing the angry forces of the sea, and of her own passionate heart, upon the shore. So, when the man, walking by her side, asked after her husband, she answered very quietly that

Randal was to return shortly from a journey round the world, and that she should, before the time arrived, quit her present lodgings, and return to town. Then MacBee asked after her brother, and, with a slightly embarrassed manner, after her sister, Mrs. Silverhayes. By this time they had reached the house where Helen was staying, and he took his departure, lingering on the doorstep to assure himself of her recovery, and promising to give himself the pleasure of calling to inquire after her the next day.

An old lady, in widow's weeds, who had nothing else to do, and who had just taken the corresponding rooms next door, chanced to be looking out of the window, and to watch this parting with curiosity. She had only arrived in the place the day before, and she had been sitting wearily by the window, grumbling at the weather, and planning to have shrimps for tea, when her eyes were attracted, and her curiosity

rewarded, by the parting of this young couple on the next doorsteps.

At first she merely regarded it as a pleasing diversion of thought, to shorten the interval before the shrimps could be enjoyed; but, when Helen turned to bid her companion good-bye, with grateful friendliness, the old lady, who was looking on, was moved by the recognition of her face to excited exclamation. In that recognition she found interest and excitement enough to keep her glued to the chair, a quiet spectator, behind the window-curtains, of all who came and went next door all the next day, until the afternoon, when her patience was rewarded by the sight of the same gentleman ascending the steps at the same hour, and being satisfactorily admitted. Then the old lady forsook her seat, and hurried upstairs to put on her bonnet.

Having still nearly a fortnight before her husband could arrive in England, Helen

had determined to postpone her decision, with regard to the subject which had agitated her so deeply, until the end of the time. "Wisdom comes to him who waits," her friend Dr. Garfoyle had said; and she waited. Meanwhile she was ready to receive MacBee's promised call, as though nothing unusual had happened to bring them together. She questioned him with interest about his pursuits, and learnt that he had embarked on a business career; that he was engaged in the manufacture of aniline dyes for one of the great northern commercial houses.

"I always felt a great interest in chemistry at college, perhaps you remember," he said, smiling apologetically at this reference to his unimportant past; "and the work, besides filling my purse, feeds my mind. It engrosses my attention with scientific and practical experiments, and it brings me face to face with many of

the social problems of the day, by giving me a certain position in the labour market. Two of my sisters are married," he added; "the third will follow their example; the fourth is an invalid, and will stay with my mother. We are down here for her health now. Now you know all about us. May they come and see you before you leave? You were kind enough to say you would be glad to see us. Perhaps," he added, with some embarrassment, "when I am ten or a dozen years further on, I may look out for a wife for myself; but at present—— Well, you understand, Mrs. Keltridge."

And she did understand that the past was not yet past enough; that his feeling about Ciceley had exhausted for the time being, and for some time to come, all the "desires of his heart" in that direction.

"It is like the effect of colour upon the retina of the eye," he said, betraying

some emotional feeling. “ You exhaust your capacity for seeing by gazing too long upon one colour. When you have had time to revert to the normal condition, you see again when other pictures are presented to the retina. But I am content, and more than content, with my present lot.”

“ Mrs. Crayse,” said the maid, appearing upon the scene, and ushering in the lady from next door, greatly to the annoyance of Helen.

They shook hands stiffly, with formal explanations. Then, turning to Mr. MacBee, who had risen to take his leave, Mrs. Crayse said—

“ Your brother, of course; Mr. Chevington Applewood, I presume ? ”

Thus forced to introduce her friend against her will, Helen performed the ceremony, and was thankful to MacBee for vanishing instantly, with a parting

promise that his mother and sisters would pay her a visit next day.

From that day onwards Mrs. Crayse enjoyed her stay at the seaside immensely. She played the spy behind the window-curtains, greatly to her own enjoyment; and she labelled the unladylike task, “a duty,” a duty to her husband’s nephew. This gave it a superior flavour. She saw Mr. MacBee, and his mother and sisters, pay their first call upon Helen, and once she actually beheld the man, alone, come and leave a note, wherein his mother invited Helen to tea; but, to Mrs. Crayse’s imagination—which reduced all things to its own level—the affair bore quite another aspect.

She called upon Helen herself, very often, and carefully catechized her as to Randal’s plans, and as to the date of his expected return. She said all the disagreeable things that occurred to her, and she promised herself the pleasure of saying

more, when she should make an opportunity of interviewing Randal—as she had fully determined that she would do.

Helen endured her behaviour much on the same principle on which one puts up with the conduct of flies in summer, in the first place because nothing else can be expected of them, in the second because they are too insignificant for serious regard. Mrs. Crayse's conversation possessed, indeed, about the same relative importance as the buzz of an exasperating blue-bottle ; but given that you cannot catch, or crush the insect, you may be driven to remove yourself in the end. So, one day, Helen packed her boxes, and returned to town. On this occasion Mrs. Crayse did not allude to celestial joys awaiting her, since she had nearer gratifications in promise. She was going “to tell,” and, since she had been five years old, no occupation had ever pleased her half so well as that. Meanwhile Helen

was engaged in a conflict in which she knew too little of the nature of the conditions with which she had to contend; she never won any victories, since her foes as yet were ambushed.

The time had arrived in which Randal's ship might be in at any hour, and she resolved, if it were possible to get Chevington's attention to her difficulties, that she would lay the case before him. It would not, she knew, be an easy task, for his sympathies, torn from their earlier resting-place, more and more resolutely winged their flight towards his chosen work in the distant land, which he had certainly relinquished for a time only for her sake. He was evidently very happy to see her back again; and, after they had dined together, he stood before her, in his chosen spot upon the rug, drawing himself up to his magnificent height, an undoubted welcome shining in the eyes which used to scan the face of man and woman with such a

searching glance, but which now, in place of their former penetration, commonly wore the rapt expression of the enthusiast.

He asked no questions about her stay at the seaside ; things like that did not interest him. It was characteristic of his present state of mental abstraction that he had told his sisters next to nothing about the work in which he had so zealously engaged, and that his conversation, now he had returned, left them as much in the dark as his letters had done, in respect to all those details which the traveller and the philanthropist equally delight in. His attitude was, as ever, that of the man who has seen one change so great that henceforth all changes are practically indifferent to him. He listened with only a wandering attention whilst she spoke of their former friend MacBee ; but when she informed him of her husband's expected return, his attention was immediately arrested by her words. He

started forward eagerly, with earnest congratulations, and felicitated her warmly upon the happiness which the prospect of Randal's arrival must cause her. He hoped that his health had benefited by his travels, and he assured her feelingly that Randal's gain would be his loss in her society.

All this was very painful to her, and it was almost with despair of awakening any corresponding emotion in his absent mind, that she said desperately—

“ But, Chevington, you seem to forget that Randal went away and left me of his own accord ; and, if you knew all, you would not wonder that I cannot rejoice at his return, and that I would now far rather stay and live with you here.”

She saw that it was necessary to speak as plainly as possible to this altered brother of hers, who seemed to have so little power of response. For an instant her unexpected words startled him into pained attention.

With a manifest effort, he recalled the thoughts for ever busy with the unseen.

“Helen, that grieves me, shocks me to hear,” he said, in a low and broken voice; “but the time is so short, life is so brief for joy, equally brief for sorrow, that surely——”

She interrupted him passionately; she could not bear to hear that which he would have said, and meant too, for of his expression of genuine conviction there could be no manner of doubt.

“For joy such as yours was, my brother, the time may, indeed, have been too short,” she answered, whilst the hands which lay in her lap proved, by the tension of the fingers, how intense was the suppressed emotion which prompted her. “But for misery such as mine has been, it is ages long; too long to be endured. Listen, Chevington,” she said bitterly. “You must not judge of Randal by yourself; he has never been to me what you were to Margaret. Men with

strong natures, like your own, can afford to be tender and pitiful to women ; they love and shield them as we, when we are mothers, cherish and protect our children. Men of Randal's weak and irritable temperament are exacting, suspicious, jealous, even cruel upon occasion. They are so wretched themselves that they involve any woman who belongs to them in the morbid misery of their lot. Now do you understand why I would rather stay with you ? ”

Chevington's look was again one of extreme distress.

“ Yet you chose him,” he said briefly.

“ These were things I had not learnt ; I could not know beforehand,” she faltered.

“ You knew him to be lame, feeble, and melancholy, I suppose. And, pardon me, Helen, but I always believed that you deliberately took upon yourself the task of helping him. I thought it a motive worthy of you, my sister. I should never have dared

to advise such a marriage ; but I never held it my duty to dissuade you from it. I cannot speak from experience, never having been worthy of such a task as you undertook ; but I should have said, my sister, that the hand which is stretched out to bind up another's hurts, by the same act must, in the end, find the healing of its own. Does love count its wounds ? I have always felt that it was by your love you would save him from himself. Even if he needs your forgiveness, is that a thing impossible to love ? ”

“ If he had any need of me, or any value for my love, Chevington, I would have lavished it upon him. You are right ; I did mean to be everything to him when we were married. But the point is, that he has rejected me.”

“ That does not agree with your statement as regards his return. Forgive me, Helen, I cannot dictate to you ; all my life has been so comparatively straightforward and easy

that I have no claim. Also, I doubt if any man ever can advise any woman, even if it be his own sister, upon these points ; men's and women's views of their relations to each other differ, I have observed, so widely. My experience has all, as you know, been summed up in one supreme event, which, whilst it has removed from me the formal possession of my love, has resulted in bringing to me an intense realization of her invisible presence. To me she is, as you know, actually a living, present reality. But I suppose that there is at least this parallel between our cases, that both of us have been rudely thrust out from our earthly paradise ; one of us by bodily death apparently premature, the other by the death of hopes legitimately entertained. Perhaps you will care to hear what I found at first ? That to the self-centred spirit no answer comes ; that it is vain in one's agony to seek it in earth or heaven,

to ask it of the human heart or the human intellect. The light only begins to dawn when one realizes that the conditions only are changed, that love itself is one and is immortal. Perhaps no love ever works out its real fulfilment here; whether completed or unfulfilled, prosperous or the reverse, it may be that it is but fragmentary, never to be more than a prophecy of a future perfection. It may be, I have often thought so, that the real completion is for ever elsewhere, in some further state, where all realizations dreamed of will be accomplished by some natural process of development. Whether the present fruition is destroyed by the death of the body, as in my case, or by the disarrangement of circumstances, as in yours, the result in the end may be the same; only that mine is perhaps the easiest form of the same lesson, yours the hardest. Yes! I can see how yours is harder, far harder," he said tenderly. "There is no

want of sympathy in all that I say—oh no ! Yet it remains my fixed impression, Helen, that all this apparent confusion is for such a little time, for such a very brief period."

Helen looked at him and saw that his clear eyes had taken on again the visionary gaze, now so habitual to him.

" But," she said, recalling him almost sharply, " it did not seem brief to you, at first, Chevington."

He shivered. " At first," he said, " it was an eternity. Must you plunge me into it again, my sister ? For your sake I would bear much ; but that memory is a descent into hell."

" Then," she said, speaking bitterly, " you can well understand that to me now, your conviction of the brevity of all suffering counts for just nothing, though your sympathy is very precious to me."

" You should go to Silverhayes," he said, " if you want practical advice. He has seen

a good deal of Randal. And I am no longer able to concentrate my thoughts upon actual details of conduct as I once might have done."

"No," she said, "I could not speak my deeper mind to Unwin. He is, and always has been, very kind; but he is a doctor, and he takes a purely materialistic view of all situations."

"I thought women had always some favourite priest, to whom they carried their difficulties?" he said.

"For those to whom the authority of the individual conscience is supreme there is no sanctuary in the decisions of any Church or its ministers," said Helen. "There was, indeed, one priest whom I did consult. He was a man of whom it was said that he even 'blew soap-bubbles to the glory of God;' but all the highest lessons that I have learnt have been taught me unconsciously by one unknown to you, one whom

I met but thrice, and shall never meet again. He was a man less careful of himself and of his own reputation than of the souls he sought to succour by a love which was the purest worship of the Master whom fidelity to his intellectual convictions forbade him ever to name. All the lessons that you speak of, I, too, have learnt, Chevington, since Randal left me, by no personal appropriation, but in response to sympathies which were mine, only as they were those of all whose woes found an echo in the true heart of one divinely compassionate being. My worthiest teaching of Divine love has been conditioned by its representation in one pure soul, whose mere outlook of sympathetic sorrow held more healing than the lips of other men can utter, or their arms' embrace enfold. By the mere service of his outbreathed but unworded compassion, by the bare touch of his hand across the gulf which separated us, he healed

my wounded spirit. The benediction of this rare personality, coming into my solitary life and stirring it to its depths, has taught me, too, that love has lessons which transcend its gifts. This vision of love has become to me a religion, a worship ; to me, indeed, a gospel, foretelling that far-off future wherein, as you say, all love, whether it has found its symbolic representation here, or not, must experience its further development—whatever that unknown presentment may be—in some diviner state."

"To me it is not far off," were the words that reached Helen's ear in immediate response ; but presently he added, as though with a supreme effort—

"Would you like me to go down to Cambridge, and see Randal for you, and ascertain his disposition before you meet him yourself?"

"I think I should be glad," she answered, "if you could bring yourself to do so."

Late that evening Helen received a telegram, in which her husband announced his arrival in England, and his intention of proceeding straight to his college rooms that night.

"Then I will go down to Cambridge," Chevington said, "by the first train tomorrow morning."





CHAPTER VIII.

CHEVINGTON Applewood went up to Cambridge, as he had promised his sister, by an early train the next day. As he was walking down to the college, in front of the porter's lodge he met the man of whom he went in search. But so great was the change for the better in his brother-in-law's appearance that, at first, he scarcely recognized him. He had discarded his crutch, and now walked with a stick only. But, if the improvement in his looks was manifest, his manner was as abrupt and discouraging as ever. His reception of Chevington's greeting was as uncordial as possible, and it was clear that, though he

might be prepared to receive explanations, he was determined not to make any advances towards a reconciliation with his wife. Chevington, ignoring his evident ill-humour, complimented him upon the additional two stone in weight which he had certainly brought back with him, and upon his general appearance of renewed health and strength, which now even compared favourably, so he protested, with his, Chevington's, own. Grunting his acknowledgment of these friendly criticisms, Randal led the way, in a surly fashion, up the well-remembered staircase, to his own rooms, under those which Applewood had formerly occupied himself. But he seemed nervously anxious to postpone any explanation, and, pleading an engagement, took his departure at once, promising to return in half an hour.

Applewood agreed to wait for him, and, seated in an easy-chair, he plunged at once

into absorbing memories of the past, connected with those college rooms. Randal kept him waiting for over an hour ; but he knew nothing of the flight of time, and was startled when his brother-in-law reappeared.

Randal had, in point of fact, an appointment at the Bull, with his aunt, Mrs. Crayse, and, when he returned, he was distinctly in a worse state of mind than when he went to see that very respectable old lady.

Chevington roused himself, and began the conversation. But, to all that he said, Randal made scarcely any reply ; and such answers as he did give, conveyed any sense but that of holding himself to have been in any way to blame for anything that had occurred. Whilst complaining bitterly of the letter which Helen had sent him, he expressed no penitence, on his side, for that which he had written to her, nor for his past conduct in any detail.

Chevington was hardly surprised. He knew that it would not have been in harmony with his brother-in-law's nature to act otherwise, since his conduct was always dictated by the intellect rather than by the heart. Those who, like Helen, were liable to be carried away at times by passionate feeling, must be ready, so Randal clearly held, to humble themselves, and to solicit forgiveness for the annoyance which their too hasty self-consideration might have inflicted on others; but for such people as himself, who always acted upon convictions, intelligently arrived at and deliberately held, any retracing of steps was an impossibility. To pick a thought to pieces backwards, unless the process demonstrated a flaw in the argument, did but serve to strengthen one of such a habit of mind in his previous convictions. Hence, as Randal's reasoning was good, and his conduct based upon propositions legitimately entertained, reconsideration of any

question did but strengthen him in his convictions. Repentance was an emotional form of thought unknown to him. Had he come back feeble and ailing, an invalided being, an appeal to Helen's sympathies would have rendered the matter easier ; but the reverse was the case, and Chevington found in his task sufficient exercise for the forbearance of the mediator. The divergence between a mind ruled by laws of logic and that ruled by laws of love was great.

Mrs. Crayse had been little more successful in her efforts at mischief-making, than Chevington was in his attempts at peace-making. Her insinuations were beneath Randal's contempt; but still the fact remained that Helen had been in MacBee's society, and that she had written that letter of refusal to return, which he carried about in his pocket, at the same time and place. Randal's jealous disposition recalled the early feelings of annoyance with which their inter-

course with this same man had inspired him ; he even remembered, with irritation, the mistake of their travelling-companion. To Mrs. Crayse herself he revealed nothing of all this ; and his manner was so unguardedly repellent that she found it desirable to take herself off without further delay. Yet, though he would never have owned it, the thought of her mean and malicious words did influence him in his interview with Applewood.

Some such suspicion presently prompted Chevington to say hotly—

“ Listen to me, Kelridge. You compel me to speak to you plainly. You have no conceivable complaint to make against your wife. All the fault has been on your side. You left her at your own pleasure ; you order her to return at your convenience. Your part should be to endeavour to win her back again. You should entreat, and not command. You have, I tell you, to win your

wife's love back again. You may find it a harder task than it was at first ; but surely it should be a welcome one. Come to my house, man, and win your wife back again. Your present position is simply an untenable one. It is your conduct which needs defence, not Helen's."

"When I am heard to arraign my wife's conduct in the very least particular, it will be time to call upon me to defend my own," he said stiffly. "If I had not entertained the strongest conviction that, in absenting myself for two years, I was acting in Helen's interests as well as my own, I should not have taken the step. All that I sought to gain by the course I adopted I have gained ; my decision is therefore justified. I come back to find an inevitable accumulation of work needing my immediate attention, and I naturally beg Helen to return to me at once. You are, I suppose, aware that she has refused compliance with this most reasonable

request. It is I, therefore, who await her change of disposition. At the same time, if you and she make a point of my doing it, I am prepared to find time to come up to town and meet her at your house, in the course of a few days. I cannot come at once; that is out of the question."

With this concession, such as it was, Chevington saw that he must be contented, and he left, saddened at heart, yet restrained from any display of feeling by the unsympathetic temperament of the other man.

Yet, cold, taciturn, and unyielding as Randal remained, Chevington was convinced that his secret soul was pining in this strange divorce. How gladly would his empty hands have brought to these two, Randal and Helen, one draught of the pure joy that had been his own, now that his lips knew such thirst no longer! From their history his thoughts reverted to his own past. How long ago it seemed, and yet what a short

time it was in reality, little more than four years, since he had leant against that doorway, listening to the ringing cheers of the supper-party which had greeted his easy compliance with their demand for "a speech." At every step he was confronted with living memories, as he trod the too familiar ways. By the gravel walks, and over the bridge, how well he knew the very pebbles beneath his feet, as he turned his steps towards the sad house at Newnham, where he had loved and lost his peerless wife. At every turn friendly faces confronted him, and kindly greetings reached his ears, mingled possibly with a tone of curiosity ; for the story of his present mode of life was not unknown in his former haunts. But if some natural question as to the mental balance of the man had ever been started, criticism was always held in check by the kindest feeling for him. So much must be permitted to one who had lost so much, and who had been, so short

a time ago, the most popular man in his college.

Associations interwoven with every spot of ground claimed their tribute of remembrance from him. Here he had reaped the honours of the senate house, there he had enjoyed the triumphs of the athlete. But the thoughts and ideas which woke an echo in the hearts of those who now filled these rooms and courts fell upon his unresponsive ears as mere sound bereft of their former meanings. His interest had died out of all that had formerly occupied his attention here. The river of thought, for ever changing in this changing centre, flowed on in its rapid course ; but it passed him by as one powerless now either to sail with its strong stream, or to stem the swiftness of its current. He was aware of a marked heightening of memory, which he observed curiously, anxious if possible to trace its psychological meaning ; he realized his

condition this day as of one walking on the heights of being, endowed with a quick aptitude and perfection of faculty, extending even to the domain of the senses. With strange acuteness he remembered every detail, revived every emotion of the past. It was as though his spirit had obtained some new deliverance from the limitations which ordinarily restrained it, in the exercise of powers more than normal. But nothing in him longed to mingle with the academic life that had been his, again ; the things that had moved him and others had lost their hold upon him. He was become indifferent alike to the studies and the sports of the place, and such conversation as he shared with those he met seemed to him uninteresting, or even intrusive.

Passing by the house at Newnham, he walked out to the little churchyard, at Milmead Manor, and stood, for the first time since he had laid her there, by the grave on

which was inscribed the name of Margaret, wife of Chevington Applewood, with her nameless infant child. Where he had looked forward to a long life of home and study, he possessed a tombstone and nothing more.

Then, as he stood there, face to face with the ruin of his earthly felicity, a passion of infinite regret swept through his heart and convulsed his powerful frame. Heart and brain both reeled in rebellion against this ghastly irony, this final tragedy of marriage as mortal flesh knows it. In another turn of the cycle of time, these strong hands, these powerful limbs, the whole beautiful machinery of that wonderful organism which obeyed his will, would lie there discarded, relic of his by relic of hers. Age-old thought, which has the strength of an eternity in its horror to repel, in its magic to fascinate. “Hands that we have clasped, lips that we have kissed ! Ah, God ! these graveyards bury our hearts in the earth ; they make infidels or madmen

of us all. Better far a burial at sea, or the burning pile of the ancient Greek. Never will I come here again!"

He turned and left the spot, yet returned and paused.

" Margaret! Come too," he said; "let us choose a fitter meeting-place than this."

Presently he went to see Mrs. Gruter and the ex-professor, who was now free to fill his innocent leisure as he chose, since the "excellent substitute" had become the genuine article, and now displayed a profound acquaintance with the hidden things which Mr. Gruter had formerly so "worthily represented."

When he left them, to return to town, as Mrs. Gruter kissed him, with tears in her eyes, Chevington said—

" Take care of her grave for me, mother. I shall never visit it again."

His words sent a shiver through her.

" My son," she said, " for us life is over:

we are old. But for you, surely it is still possible; for you love might be reborn, for you it still might take new shape. Do not withhold your heart from such hopes. Remember, Margaret's mother, loving you as her own son, would gladly see you comforted."

"There is no past, no present, and no future, mother," he answered, as he rose to go, "save that in which I was, and am, and shall be Margaret's; when you love me, think of that. Think, too, that all is not ended, even that it has scarcely yet begun."

"Alas! Chevington," she cried, for his words and manner made her shiver with mingled emotions of sorrow and fear, "is it indeed true that your heart is broken?"

"If all whose hearts are broken were as blest as I am, my mother, a broken heart would be a thing for which to pray," he said, as he stooped to kiss her, and finally departed.

The night on which Chevington Applewood returned to London from Cambridge was one long remembered in the annals of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade.

When Applewood reached Liverpool Street Station, he was attracted by the reflection of a conflagration, which, having its origin among some warehouses on the river, presently illuminated the whole of East London. The upper floors of the building in which the fire originally broke out were occupied as a paper-bag manufactory; but the flames speedily penetrated the roofs of some lower erections, and one building after another was involved in the burning mass. Upon one of the adjacent buildings Chevington Applewood, with his training as a sailor, his remarkable agility, and contempt of danger, succeeded in getting a footing, and busily occupied himself in rendering assistance; the firemen recognizing an exceptional ally, the police being too busy

in keeping back the obstructive crowd, to concern themselves about a volunteer who so nobly distinguished himself.

Steamer after steamer was set to work as the engines arrived upon the scene; full thirty were ultimately upon the ground; whilst two hundred firemen, summoned from all the available stations, were at work upon the burning buildings. Among them might be distinguished, in the forefront of danger, the commanding figure of the intrepid volunteer, Chevington Applewood.

The extension ladders were disposed against the walls of the nearest adjacent buildings, not yet alight, and the firemen were standing on them, directing the deliveries of streams of water into the centre of the conflagration, when suddenly a woman, with a child clasped in her arms, appeared, and by her frantic gestures appealed for help, at one of the most inaccessible windows of the burning pile. Escape by the stairways

had long been cut off, to reach her in any way with succour seemed to the onlookers as desperately impossible; yet one man was already preparing to make the attempt.

Before the professional rescuers had had time to agree upon a concerted scheme of action, Chevington Applewood had climbed from the topmost rungs of the ladder upon which he had stood, to the ledge of the window immediately below that at which the woman showed herself. Then a common thrill of horror ran through the dense crowd, as they saw him draw up the superior part of the ladder, and, planting it upon a narrow parapet, commence an ascent into the very flames which by now surrounded her.

“The man is mad,” was passed from mouth to mouth.

Several of the firemen strove to follow him, but were beaten back by the smoke and flames. But Chevington Applewood struggled upwards towards the victim,

utterly regardless, even unconscious of peril, with powers to be found only under such supreme conditions. Those who looked on were ignorant of the force of the motive which inspired him. Once again his own passion had created, or Margaret's deathless love had possibly animated for him, a living image of more than mortal reunion with her.

Through all the intervening space of time Chevington Applewood had carried in his heart the memory of that first vision of his lost love which had blessed his sight. The impression of that vision had been intensified as often as it had been imaginatively or accidentally recalled, until now, when, in this supreme moment, it was repeated by association, he surrendered himself to it, with no shade of doubt or misgiving. Once more he rapturously beholds, with certainty, his deathless love, his bride, his wife, whom he had sought so long. His strength is as the

strength of ten ; his safety that of the sleep-walker. He reaches the object of his desire through the flames which envelop her, making a burning solitude for them both. His energy is no longer delirious, his triumph is subdued by its own intensity. Never again will he awake from this dream of ecstasy. Within a dusky veil of smoke which suffocated and blinded them, she fell, an unconscious burden, into his embrace.

At that instant a terrific explosion occurred. The fire had ignited a quantity of chemicals stored in the basement. The whole fabric was instantly a glorious mass of coloured flames. The man, with the young woman and child in his arms, sank back together into the furnace. As they disappeared from sight, the entire front of the burning buildings fell in, burying them beneath the blazing ruins. Thus Chevington Applewood passed up through the fire into the light.

But some of those that stood nearest related how, just ere the burning building fell, the man turning—whilst yet his arms encircled the swooning form within their grasp—and earnestly looking down on them, must have seen for an instant, as the clouds of smoke were parted by the explosion, a wondrous glow of fiery light reflect the sympathetic soul on every face—souls uplifted by his example into noble fellowship with heroic deeds. And then the end had come, and the light of Chevington Applewood's life vanished in the unconsuming fire, which, melting all sorrows, irradiating all mysteries, and consecrating all gifts whether of love or life, has illumined the night of ages.

When the official report came out, as quoted in the daily papers, it stated that seven warehouses had been burnt out, and the roofs off; that two firemen were buried beneath the ruins of one of the

buildings which had been blown up by chemicals stored there ; further, that a gentleman, by name Chevington Applewood, said to have been at one time in the Royal Navy, and who made a gallant attempt to rescue the unfortunate inmates of the burning building before the firemen arrived on the scene, had been engulfed in the flames, whilst endeavouring to save the young wife of the director of the factory, who, with her infant in her arms, had appeared at a fourth-story window, appealing for aid. No traces of the bodies either of the man or of the young woman and child were afterwards discovered. They must have been reduced to ashes by the intense heat of the seething mass into which they were precipitated, and by which they were instantaneously buried.

Thus Chevington Applewood's end was in harmony with his desire. His feet never trod the grass sward of Milmead churchyard

again. His lifeless body was never laid by Margaret's in a bitter travesty of mortal marriage. No human hands arrayed the beautiful frame which had so fitly enshrined his noble spirit; but the angels who apparelled him for his celestial bridal were God's ministers, His flames of fire.

They held a memorial service in the college chapel, at which, by Helen Keltridge's desire, the address was given by her friend Dr. Terence Garfoyle.

“When a musician,” he said, “writes a symphony or a fugue, he prefaces it with a ‘Leit-Motif,’ whose governing melody you may trace, if you are attentive enough, through all the subsequent windings of the theme. But it is only when the symphony of a life has passed beyond our hearing, to form part of the Heavenly Orchestra, that we can succeed in determining the dominant harmony of the whole, and even then it is necessary that we bring to the

loving study, hearts attuned in sympathy with the player, the echo of whose melody is vibrating in our hearts. No criticism of the variations of the theme, wherein even the instruments most in unison are not expected to play note for note, is here demanded of us. There may be varieties and intricacies in the working out of the master thought of the 'Liebes Motif' by which the musician was inspired, wherein we may be unable, from divergence of temperament, or of training, to follow him with perfect comprehension; but if it is permitted me to render in words the music of the grand life of our friend who passed from our midst when 'God's glory smote him in the face,' and who ascended per ignem, per crucem, ad lucem--this is how I would interpret it to you--in taking his own words, 'By our loves we are immortal;' or let us take hers who was his Psyche, his soul's inspirer, whose end

kindled at once the light which illuminated his spirit with the unconsuming fire of God, and wrapt his body in the winding-sheet of flame which hid it for ever from our sight—‘I die, but my love remains.’

“By all the loves that we have known and felt, have dreamed or grasped, we are immortal! By all that we have realized, by all that we have missed; by all that we once held, as well as all that we still strive to retain, we are immortal! In our affections lie hidden the arguments for our continuance. Love and die, you cannot think it, till your hearts have grown colder than can be the hearts of any whose sympathies have brought them here to-day. Love and live, you must, or hope it. ‘Life,’ I repeat, ‘is energy of love,’ divine or human!

“To this divine spark in us, our friend, whom we have loved so well, cries, with every breath of his triumphant soul, ‘By the love by which I have vanquished per-

sonal desolation, mortal agony, and a fiery death, by my love, by our loves we are immortal !' By such a thread of love she who was his bride has drawn our brother upwards, to follow her through the fire into the light. In the light of that love we leave them united. Since the deathless Christ has lived and loved, since such men as this have lived and loved, and since we live and love, neither they nor we can perish !"

The then dean, the young one, took serious exception to his predecessor's discourse, and mentioned the fact to the senior tutor. He had, he said, "expected better things of Dr. Garfoyle, although it was a tradition in the college that his judgment was never to be relied on." But the tutor endeavoured to console him with the assurance, based upon his own and his wife's observation, that "the men never really took any notice of anything that was said in chapel." As the dean himself had preached

to them on the preceding Sunday, this remark cut short the conversation.

When Helen Keltridge entered the chapel on that memorable autumn day the place by her side had been vacant. Mr. and Mrs. Gruter, Ciceley, Unwin, and Miss Silverhayes were all present together; but she was unaccompanied and alone. She bent her head in silent grief; but, before she raised it up, one entered and knelt by her side; and, under cover of a college gown, a hand grasped hers. No need for her to turn her head, she felt and knew who it was. For by his death Chevington Applewood had accomplished the last fraternal task in which in life he had hardly been successful.

To the husband and wife thus reunited, the occasion was one of a solemn bridal rather than of a funeral service. To them it was a moment of reunion, traversed with deep regret, calling for faith and patience; but illumined with hope. Under the shadow

of the great joy and great sorrow which this service commemorated, in sympathy with the glorious consummation of two transfigured souls on Helen's part, and in sincere regret for personal loss on Randal's, their tried spirits met. Through doubt and fear, and sorrow and pity, they were united at last in a love which rendered all separation henceforth impossible.

Before many years had passed Ciceley's happy children shouted the names "Chevington" and "Margaret" to each other, across the shining greenswards of Milmead Manor-house, fair flowers of the eternal spring, wherewith love repaired the ruins that death had wrought, by the promise of their dewy blossoms covering its barren graves. To Miss Silverhayes these cherished children were at once the purest benediction of her age, and the abiding pledge that, through the channels of new hearts, the old love should continue to flow, when her feet.

at rest for ever, could no longer follow their bright course about the lawns, or her voice respond, with the perfect comprehension of the child-lover, to their innocent curiosities, whilst they themselves were to her pure spirit the living, lovely answers to the meek questions of her life.

They erected a memorial window to Chevington Applewood's memory in the college chapel, wherein was represented an ancient story, which showed how Three walked in the midst of the flames unhurt, with a Fourth, whose form was like unto that of the Son of God.

THE END.



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